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WILLIAM ROBINSON SKIFF

AND HIS SON

VERNON WILLIAM SKIFF

A Biographical Sketch

by

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Written for the Jasper County, Iowa, Historical Society.

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A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

WILLIAM ROBINSON SKIFF

AND HIS SON

VERNON WILLIAM SKIFF

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IN 1942, Newton, in Jasper County, Iowa, will be one hundred years old as the abode of the white man. As this section of our country approaches its centenary birthday, it will not be amiss for a grandmother of 1937 to recount a few memories of her parents and grandparents who were among the pioneer residents of that now venerable community.

Matters biographical usually begin with ancestors, whose dim and misty figures too quickly fade into that rapidly receding past where we also shall soon travel. Looking backward, ancestors multiply very fast. There is a whole village full of them ten generations back and from the viewpoint of tracing hereditary strains each one in that village is of equal importance in transmitting new unit characters into the blood stream. Too many generations back is therefore complicated and confusing but closer in one may catch snap shot views of hereditary trends.

William Robinson Skiff, third child of Edmund and Betsy (Robinson), was born December 22, 1809, on a farm near Hartwick, Otsego County, New York. Pioneering was in his blood for he came from a long line of sturdy, upstanding, hard work-

ing pioneers. It may have been in his blood because it was in his environment. At any rate each generation before him pushed on to new American frontiers.

The immigrant was James Skiff, who came from England to America about 1636. He settled in Sandwich, Massachusetts, in 1637. It is possible that the family tendency toward liberality in religious viewpoints was present in James, the immigrant. He was one of the first eleven members of the Puritan Congregational Church of Sandwich. Tho the Puritans left England because of religious persecution, they had not yet learned their lesson of toleration. In 1639, James was summoned to the General Court, the governing power of the colony, charged with "traducing the law about refusing to take the Oath of Fidelity." Evidently he had been vigorously impugning that law. It was at this time that Roger Williams, who was one of the first in America to fight for the cause of religious liberty, was proclaiming that church membership and the Oath of Fidelity should not be required for voting and holding office, and that only church members should be taxed for the support of the church. It was not until many years later that these contentions were accepted.

Some Puritan Skiffs

In 1644, James Skiff was elected in Sandwich to represent his community in the General Court and he served in that capacity for many years. In 1659, when persecution of Quakers was at its height, the General Court refused to allow him to take his seat because of his "toleration of Quakers," but the next year Sandwich re-elected him. It appears that he was a man of strong convictions and fearless in upholding them. It is with pardonable pride that we find the

first Skiff in America courageously supporting Williams and willing to bear a little persecution for the cause of tolerance.

William Skiff's line of descent is as follows:

First Generation	James Skiff married Mary Reeves. Lived in Sandwich, Mass. Had nine children. He died after 1687.
Second Generation	Nathan Skiff, 1658-1726. Married Hepsibah Codman. A farmer on Martha's Vineyard. Had eight children.
Third Generation	Stephen Skiff, 1693-1737. Married Elizabeth Hatch. Moved to Tolland, Conn. Farmer. Had seven children.
Fourth Generation	Benjamin Skiff, 1727-1812. Married Elizabeth Eaton. Farmer. The family were living in the Wyoming Valley, Pa., at the time of the terrible Indian Massacre of July 13, 1778, but they escaped with their children and walked back to their old home in Kent, Conn. The frightful scenes and hardships of that experience were never forgotten. They afterwards moved to Hartwick, N. Y. They had eleven children.
Fifth Generation	Stephen Skiff, 1760-1835. Married Adah Bates. He was a soldier in the Revolutionary War. Moved to Allegheny County, N. Y. Had eight children. It is through Adah Bates that the line leads back to the Mayflower. Her mother was Rachel Fuller, three of whose ancestors

came over in the Mayflower, namely, Edward Fuller, his wife Anne, and their ten year old son, Samuel. Edward and Anne both died from the terrible hardships of the first winter, but Samuel lived to rear a large family.

Sixth Generation — Edmund Skiff, 1781-1850. Married Betsy Robinson. He was a farmer, Allegheny County, N. Y. Had six children.

Seventh Generation — William Robinson Skiff, 1809-1881. Married Abigail Whitcomb Axtell. Farmer. Merchant. Moved to Iowa, 1853. Had two children.

Sons of the Revolutionary Soldier

Six of Stephen's sons, including Edmund, bought adjoining farms from the Holland Purchase Company in Allegheny County, New York. Two or three of the brothers moved there about 1809. Edmund first moved in 1812, but his wife Betsy, was so unhappy because of the many Indians in the vicinity that he returned to Hartwick. It was not until 1818 that he made the final move to Allegheny County. It was at that time that Stephen said to one of his friends, "Yes, brother Doud, my six sons have bought adjoining farms in Allegheny County so that I can visit all six of them and never have to step foot off our land."

Boyhood in Old New York

William was about nine years old when his father moved from Hartwick to the more western frontier. William tells this story of his father:

When they were moving, Edmund sent a wagonload of household goods on ahead to be there when the family arrived. As the man was leaving, he said, "When I get there, where shall I leave the goods?" Ed-

mund thought a moment and then replied, "Oh, find a man who does not believe in hell and damnation, and leave it with him." With Edmund's family of three children were also his father and mother, Stephen and Adah, and his old grandmother, Elizabeth, then eighty-two years old. They ensconced her in the wagon as comfortably as possible for the long journey. Stephen and Adah built their home across the road from their son Edmund. It was said that old Elizabeth screamed in great fright every time an Indian appeared at their door, so vividly did it recall to her memory the fearful scenes of the Indian Massacre of 1778. She died two years after their migration to Allegheny County at the age of eighty-four years.

Those farms came to be known as the Skiff Neighborhood and the "Skiff grit" was a common aphorism at that time. Edmund was a thrifty and prosperous farmer. Three more children were born to them there which gave William three sisters and two brothers.

In a new frontier

The Yankee farmer world of those days was quite self-sufficing. Stephen was proud of his garden, his crimson currants and his golden pumpkins, and as he carried his grist to Mill's Mill, he related with gusto the evidences of superior intelligence in his favorite horse. In the spring when they tapped their maples, sugaring-off time was a busy season and in the fall they made plenty of cider from their own apples. The cider barrel was in every household. It was the popular drink. When the snow began to fall and they were driven indoors, the men gathered around the stove at the corner grocery or in the tavern and discussed the fine points of their most engrossing

topic, religion. In those days all New England seethed with these disputations. There were many obscurities to be examined in detail, pre-destination, infant damnation, total depravity, eternal punishment, partial punishment, universal salvation. They talked very intimately of the hereafter. In their thirst for truth, imagination was given a wide scope. They could imagine that the moon was made of green cheese, but was it? They could imagine that the blue sky was a heaven where all the good people go when they die, but was it? In Boston, American culture was flowering, led by many brilliant thinkers with Harvard as a background, paving the way for her future poets and philosophers. There John Quincy Adams was writing and fighting for justice for the negro, for the American Indian, for science, and Abigail Adams said, "If we mean to have heroes, statesmen, and philosophers, we should have learned women." But the women in the farther hinterland were not keenly aware of these matters. Books were not very plentiful in their life. Over their spinning wheels, or while making their linen sheets and wool coverlets, home grown and home spun, they discussed their religion as the men did. Adah was a strict Presbyterian. When they had Sunday dinner with their son Benjamin, his wife Laura blithely remarked that she had been busy all morning planting seeds in the garden. Benjamin kicked her foot under the table. She was not supposed to do unnecessary work on Sundays.

Presbyterian influences

Stephen was fond of telling stories of his war experiences, one, of a hazardous undertaking as a post rider thru the deep forests at night with an important message for

Washington. Two others had failed to return from this mission but he delivered it successfully. Occasionally, as on the Fourth of July, filled alike with an overdose of patriotic fervour and his favorite toddy, he mounted the rostrum and addressed the multitudes.

William grew to manhood on his father's farm with meager opportunities for schooling, inured to hard labor and reaping its compensation in the form of a powerful and muscular physique. His three sisters, known always in the family as "the girls," spent their entire life on that farm. They remembered the day when their two old "Grannies" came to live under their roof, after the death of their husbands. One, Granny Skiff (Adah Bates) was still a staunch Presbyterian, while Granny Robinson was a devout Quaker. Religious debates waxed warm. At one time both were ill, and the parlor, with two beds in opposite corners, was consigned to their use. It is whispered that their religious bias became such a sore point between them that they threw their slippers at each other.

William Married

On December 25, 1832, at the age of twenty-three, William married Abigail Whitcomb Axtell, who was born in Windsor County, Vermont, on December 8, 1812, a daughter of Alexander Axtell. They lived in Hume, a small town a few miles from his father's farm. He was interested in a tannery, tanning hides. This developed into the manufacture of boots and shoes. Another activity was extracting soda and pearlash from ashes, pearlash through a process of purifying potash leached from the wood ashes. It was extensively used in making soft soap.

Early Occupations

Two children were born to them in Hume:

1. Betsy Abigail, born August 24, 1836.
2. Vernon William, born Jan. 23, 1841.

They never had other children. Their life was full to overflowing with the duties and ambitions of good parents for the welfare of their offspring. There was a satisfactory school in Hume. Their teachers were men. William's business had become a general merchandise store. Vernon says, "Probably every other merchant in the town kept the customary barrel of whiskey which was sold at twenty-five cents a gallon," but his father would have none of it. He was a strict "teetotaler" and in spite of this "handicap" he did a thriving business. Those were the days when the story of "Ten Nights in a Bar Room" was quite descriptive of the times and his reaction against those conditions appears to have been sturdy.

William a strict teetotaler

On Sundays, Vernon often spent the day on his grandfather Edmund's old farm. Grandma and Aunt Cindy regaled him with plenty of maple sugar. Aunt Siny played cards with him to keep him entertained. When his grandfather, Edmund, died in 1850, William undertook the task of harvesting his mother's crops. Neighbors gave each other a hand on such occasions and it was customary to have the barrel of whiskey handy. William said, "I will harvest those crops and have not a drop of whiskey on the place." Everybody said he couldn't do it, but he did. Abbie and the "women folks" kept cider and ginger ale circulating freely among the "men folks" until their task was completed and then there was a feast of good things to eat.

It was in 1851 that William began to talk

William R. Skiff, with his new seven shooter, then a marvel in guns, and his faithful old hunting dog Joe. Living in Hume, N. Y., about 1851.

Taken from an old daguerreotype

Abigail Axtell Skiff, efficient home maker. Living in Hume, about 1851. Aged about 39 years.

Taken from an old daguerreotype

Vernon William Skiff, living in Hume, N. Y., 1851. Aged about 10 years.

Vernon, aged about 12, and his sister, Betsy Abigail Skiff, aged about 16 years.
Hume, N. Y., 1853

with his cousin, Harvey J. Skiff, of investigating the western prairies. Harvey, born in the Skiff Neighborhood in Allegheny County, New York, on February 5, 1821, was a graduate of Amherst College. On August 20, 1849, he married Sarah Burleigh in Castile, New York, and was ready for adventure in a new home. William and Harvey first went to Iowa in the summer of 1851, and liked it so much that Harvey decided to settle in Newton, Jasper County. William found that he could buy in the east, very cheap, horses that had "the heaves" but were otherwise fine animals. Feeding on the wild prairie grass in Iowa, free from dust, the heaves vanished. So in the summer of 1852, he returned to Iowa, bringing with him a drove of horses with the heaves, which he sold at a very good profit. He began buying up government land warrants from old soldiers of the war of 1812 who did not, themselves, wish to settle out west. He bought in Hardin County one section of six hundred and forty acres at sixty-two and a half cents an acre. He kept it for two years and sold it for seven thousand dollars. The town of Iowa Falls now stands on that land.

Iowa, a New Frontier

In 1853, having made two visits to Iowa, William concluded to remove his family there. The manner of transportation is interesting. It revealed a new world to a young boy accustomed to country life. They went by rail from Portage to Buffalo, drawn by an engine that appeared to have very sinister intentions with its astonishing belches and clanging noises. At Buffalo they boarded a steamboat, the elegance of which made round with wonder the blue eyes of the curious lad. Plowing into the western reaches of Erie and the Great

House. J. M. Blanchard, who married Cordy Lindley, also taught in a two story brick house that stood on the site of the present Central School. Vernon's first school in Newton was furnished for seats, with a wooden log, split in half and extending along the side of the wall, for a desk, a similar log raised higher.

Animal and bird life abounded

Vernon was impressed with the great flocks of pigeons that flew southward in the fall. The whole sky was fairly black with them. Vernon called them pigeons, but there were immense flocks of geese, and ducks of many kinds, teal and coot, and high above them all, great cranes floated southward in the fall. There was a perfect cloud of birds. The prairie chickens were there, swelling the anthem with their noisy chorus. It was indeed a land of plenty.

William hunted deer, elk and buffalo

William was very fond of hunting. When they were living in Hume, he used to go in the winter to Pennsylvania to be gone several weeks at a time, coming home with a sled full of deer, elk, and buffalo. He found the western prairies an inviting field for his favorite sport and his gun and hunting dog were cherished companions. A large covered basket remained in their attic for years, into which Abbie packed away good things to eat when William started on one of his hunting expeditions. William was a "good provider" and Abbie was a good cook so they had a bountiful table always.

In the fall of 1855, the family returned to Allegheny County to visit their relatives. William was concerned about his mother who had been very ill. On their return to Newton, we have a most interesting letter written by Harvey Skiff to William's mother, Betsy Skiff, in which we catch

glimpses of home life in both Iowa and Allegheny County. The letter is addressed to:

Mrs. Betsy Skiff,
Mills Mills,
Allegheny Co., N. Y.

The letter reads:

Newton, Iowa
January 20th, 1856

Dear Aunt Betsy:

For a number of weeks I have been trying to find time to redeem my promise to you, that I would write you a letter, but since my return I have been very busy. And then I thought I would wait until we all got home once more. Sarah was the last to get back. She arrived one week ago today, safe and sound. So we are all in our western home as snugly as ever, and just as well off as we desired to be. William is here in the office with me now, roasting his shins by a good coal fire, and by the way, a good fire on such a day does not come amiss for the winds are sweeping over the prairies today at a great rate. Still we all manage to keep comfortable. Sarah, Betsy* and Mrs. Gardner** were just in to see how matters and things look in the office. And they carried on so like old Nick that I had to send them home, for I don't allow any carrying on in my office on Sunday. They have now gone to our house where I suppose they are raising Ned at a great rate.

William stays here in the office most of the time, and is very busy collecting money for some men who have put their matters in his hands to attend to. He will

*Betsy (Lizzie Skiff)
**Mrs. Gardner (Sarah's sister who had married Sol Gardner and was the mother of Sarah Gardner).

sit at his desk and write until he gets tired, then he will load up his old pipe and take a smoke. On the whole, I think he enjoys himself very well. As for the rest of his folks, I reckon they are happy for they have lots of oysters and crackers and everything else to make them feel good. Abby smokes now and then as usual—and it is hard to tell whether she smokes more now than then—at all events, I reckon she smokes every now and then.

Betsy and Vernon are going to school, or rather Vern has been going the past week, and Bet is to start tomorrow I believe. Their school is a select school and I understand they have a very good teacher—a man from Ohio. There are now four schools in the village and scholars enough for more. There are more newcomers here now than have been in all western New York in ten years. Full one quarter of those whom I saw at church this morning have come here since we started east in September. But I will hold on a little for fear that you will think I am bragging and I would not have you accuse me of bragging for anything. But this much I will say anyhow and that is this: Iowa is improving very fast and almost all who come here like the new country. True, we labor under some disadvantages but it is a new country and in a few years these will disappear. I like my western home well and we are all satisfied to live here.

But it is almost dark now and I must go and feed and milk old boss, get in the night's wood, eat supper, etc., etc. And after all this is done I would like to drop in at your house and chat with you and

your folks, take a nut cake and some cider while you and Lusina took a smoke. I have left off smoking you know. Indeed I have left off all my bad habits, for I haven't smoked, played checkers, cards, or any other game since I left New York. The only intemperate habit that I have is to eat oysters with Will once in a while, and I am about out of that, as I ate so many at William's one Sunday not long ago that I was sick. So you may set me down as just about the nicest man out of jail.

The grandmas smoked a pipe in those days

But I must go now and do my chores and bid you good bye. Hoping that this will find you enjoying your usual health, and that all your folks are also well and happy, I remain,

Your affectionate nephew,

Harvey J. Skiff

P. S. Respects to Cousins Ed, Bet, Cindy, Louisa and Platt, of the young folks, and to Sina and Lon and Martha of the older stock. And all the friends here join in love to you all who are far awa'! Jasper sends greetings to Allegheny as above.

Again truly,

H. J. S.

This little poem was enclosed in Harvey Skiff's letter. It was probably written by his wife Sarah.

IOWA

There's nothing like Iowa,
  So fair on every side;
Her woods and white oak openings
  Her prairies spreading wide,
Her island groves, her shining rills,
  The blossoms on her sunny hills,
Ah, there's nothing like Iowa,
  Our wild Iowa home.

There's nothing like Iowa,
  In winter or in spring,
When the bright green decks the poplar trees
  And all the glad birds sing;
Or when dim sun hastes through the skies
  And snow upon the prairie lies,
Ah, there's nothing like Iowa,
  Our wild Iowa home.

You'll not find brighter summers
  In any Eastern land,
When the Indian corn is rustling
  In the prairie breezes bland;
When berries glisten in each glade
  Or ripen in the forest shade,
Ah, there's nothing like Iowa,
  Our wild Iowa home.

There's nothing like Iowa
  In the Indian summer days,
When the distant hills are faintly seen
  Through blue and smoky haze;
When the hunters through the forest roam
  And wild birds seek a southern home,
Ah, there's nothing like Iowa,
  Our wild Iowa home.

Boyhood in Pioneer Iowa

Vernon plowed many an acre of the virgin soil of Iowa on the land which his father was developing. He, too, complained bitterly of that contentious red root which Herbert Quick has preserved from oblivion in his stories of pioneer Iowa. It was "a stout root of wood, like red cedar or mahogany, sometimes as large as one's arm, topped with a clump of tough twigs, with clusters of pretty whitish blossoms." The boy behind the plow that encountered it was pretty apt to indulge in unprintable explosives. Mr. Fred Maytag, in his history, mentions his troubles with that same red root.

The first piano in Newton

The first piano that was ever in Newton was brought there by William for his daughter Lizzie (Betsy). It was quite an event

William Skiff and family in 1857. This picture was sent to William's mother in Allegheny County to introduce to them the new member of their family, Abel Knapp Emerson.

izzie Skiff, a bride. Married in Newton
Abel Knapp Emerson on June 3, 1857.

Harvey James Skiff, a C
the Civil War. His first wi
Burleigh Skiff, died July
On April 2, 1873, he mar
vinia Parmenter. To the
was born November 18, 18
Harvey Skiff.

in those days and the neighbors gathered around their cottage doors and windows to hear Lizzie play and sing.

Marriage of Vernon's sister

On June 3, 1857, Lizzie Skiff married Abel Knapp Emerson, a young man who had come to Newton from Vermont. At one time Mr. Emerson was in business with Joseph Hough, who named his first son for his business partner, Emerson Hough. Later, Mr. Emerson traveled for Bullock's. a boot and shoe firm in Chicago. Two beautiful children were born to Mr. and Mrs. Emerson, Gertie and Frankie, but both of these children died at the ages of five and three, within three weeks of each other, of that dreaded disease, diphtheria. A year later, on November 12, 1864, their daughter Mae was born.

Building supplies not easily obtained

It was in 1858 that William Skiff built his new home, then one of the finest residences in Newton. He cut and hauled the lumber from his farm in Clear Creek Township, basswood for the floors and black walnut for the siding. The timbers were very hard wood. Doors and sashes were hauled from Iowa City and stone for the basement from Dooley quarries and from Pella. Vernon, then seventeen years old, helped to haul the supplies and paint the house. The location was half of the block where the Besser Apartment now stands (1937), extending east to the alley. On the southwest half of the block he built his residence. On the east half he erected numerous corncribs where he stored grain for a favorable market.

As the family took possession of their new abode, they realized that the cramped condition of their earlier years in Newton

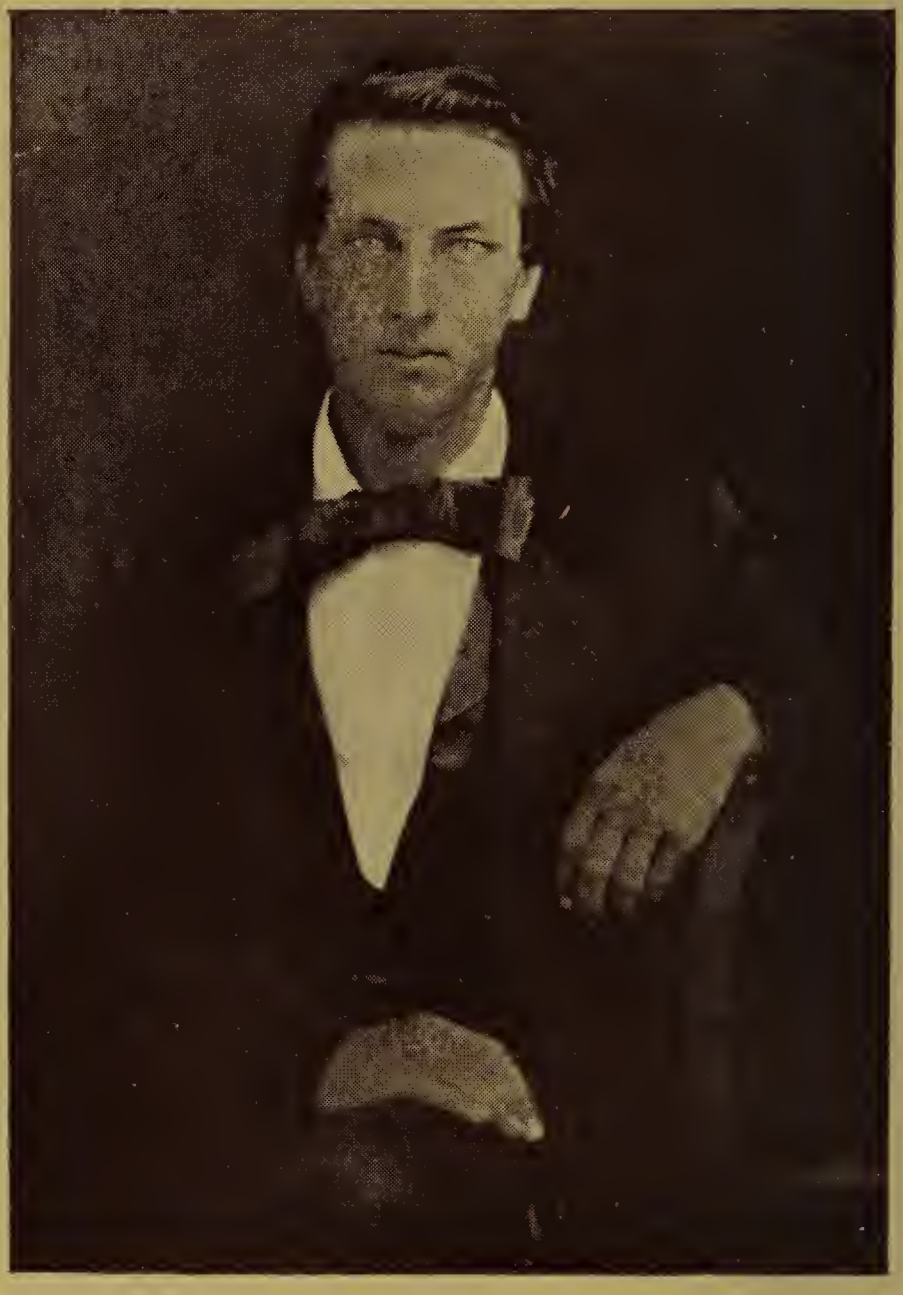
had yielded to more propitious circumstances. William's cousins in the east were writing of him, "Will has gone west and they say he has done well." Abbie quite knew how to make the new home gay with blooms. Around the grounds were hard maple and elm trees, pines and cedars, butternuts and walnuts, and of course the necessary apple, cherry and plum trees. There were flowering bushes all around the house, lilacs, snowballs, roses, flowering almonds, bleeding hearts, peonies, and beds of verbenas, petunias, four o'clocks, lady slippers. Mae used to say, "Grandma can stick anything in the ground and it will grow." In fact, she proceeded to make of it a little Iowa Kingdom of Heaven.

William was very fond of music. Latent within him there were probably undeveloped potentialities along that line. He not only provided a piano for his daughter but early encouraged his son to learn to play the cornet. Mrs. Parcell, who was Myra Donnell, a contemporary girlhood friend, living in Chicago in 1934, said, "Oh, I remember when Vern used to get up in the cupola on top of their house and toot that old horn of his." No doubt it could be heard all over the town. Music was easy for him.

Hazel Dell Academy

Vernon went to school at Hazel Dell Academy, Mr. Darius Thomas, teacher. Those were the days when he began to be interested in Molly Coffin, who was also a student at Hazel Dell. His old school books divulge a few pertinent love ditties. She was full of pranks and probably didn't mind those mischievous boys slyly spitting tobacco juice on Mr. Thomas' clean floor, for Vern was guilty too. Fortunately, that

Mary Frances Coffin living in
Newton, aged eighteen years



Vernon Skiff in Newton,
aged 20 years

never became a habit with him. Fashions change in morals as well as in dress. There was a later period when to smoke cigarettes was considered unmanly, but the cigar was an accepted adjunct of virile masculinity. Today, the use of cigarettes is almost universal, extending to women. The recorder, having now attained the grandmother stage of the game may be permitted to add "Alas." Older generations always consider "modern ways quite alarming." In the matter of cigarettes, possibly hygiene may have the last word, but not until tobacco is robbed of its profits. Newspapers will not print the known facts in regard to the poisonous effects of tobacco on the human system. Such propaganda would interfere with their thousand dollar page advertisements for popular cigarettes. The tobacco trust is powerful.

Accepted rules of conduct change

Amusements for young people in those early days were dances in the school house or in Manning's Hall, chicken fries or "spell downs" in the country to which the young people went in merry sleighing parties, gay in spirit, with jingling bells and warm buffalo robes. Were there not also "singing schools?" Then began a romance that lasted for nearly sixty years; but a cruel war intervened.

Young people found amusements

Lincoln declared war on the South.

Vernon enlisted from Newton on the first day of October, 1861, in the band of the Tenth Iowa Regiment. He was then twenty years old. The band was mustered out at Bird's Point, Missouri, February 22, 1862. He returned to Newton and joined Captain Cozad's Company. They went to Iowa City. It was at this time that Charley Gilman began to keep an interesting diary of his

The Civil War

own Civil War experiences in which he often refers to Vern. In September, 1862, Vernon was transferred to the Third Brigade Band, Fourth Division, Fifteenth Army Corps. On September 17, 1862, Charley Gilman writes, "J. H. Porter, of Grinnell, was here today and made arrangements for Vern to join his Band." The arrangement agreed upon with Vernon was that if he would join Porter's band, Porter would divide his pay with Vernon. Porter received one hundred five dollars a month as the leader of the band. All other members received seventeen dollars a month, excepting four who were termed first class musicians, receiving thirty-four dollars monthly. Vernon was one of the four. Porter agreed to give twenty dollars of his pay to Vernon and kept his verbal agreement throughout the war. The private soldier of the Civil War received thirteen dollars monthly.

On Friday, October 3, 1862, Charley Gilman writes, "Got a furlough, to be absent until the 10th inst.; went to the Governor's Office and got a pass to Newton; have to make my appearance the tenth (return) or find a substitute. Vern and I took the cars at half past eleven a. m. and arrived at Brooklyn at four o'clock. Took passage in the stage with the intention of staying overnight at Grinnell, but on arriving at Grinnell at dark, we concluded not to stay but would go on to Newton. . . . Arrived at Newton at half past twelve."

"Monday, Oct. 13, 1862. I have made arrangement for a substitute, also made arrangements to go with Porter in the band."

On October 16, they left Newton for Grinnell, where they practiced and had their

Vernon, a soldier in the Civil War. With General Dodge's Third Brigade Band.

Stationed in Corinth, Miss.

band uniforms made. On November 6, the newly constituted band embarked for Iowa City, thence to Davenport, and arrived in Corinth, Mississippi, November 28, 1862, where they were stationed at General Dodge's headquarters and went through the war as the official band of his regiment.

In the previous April, 1862, Grant's objective was Corinth where General Beauregard with his Confederate army was stationed. The battle of Shiloh, near Pittsburgh Landing, was fought early in April with apparent victory on the first day for the Confederate forces, but, with reenforcements under Buell and General Lew Wallace, the Confederates were routed and driven back on April 7. It was a bloody battlefield and cost both sides dear in men and horses.

In May, the Federal army was moving toward Corinth. There were many skirmishes and more rumors. It was during the night of May 29th that Beauregard and his Confederate army evacuated Corinth, which was a commanding point at the intersection of the Charleston and Memphis, and the Mobile and Ohio Railways. Their evacuation cut off the source of their supplies and they were anxious to regain so strategic a position. On October 3, under Price and Van Dorn, the Confederates tried to repossess Corinth. There was severe fighting for two days ending in a complete rout of the Confederates, leaving their stores and ammunition behind. Rosencrans led the Federal armies. The company of Col. Robert Ingersoll was in the thick of it, as also at Shiloh.

It was important to keep Corinth well manned. Vernon's regiment was stationed there for nearly a year.

The war diet made Vernon ill

Those were dark days for William and Abbie, hazarding their only beloved son. Once, on hearing of Vernon's illness, Abbie insisted that William should go to him. He managed with great difficulty to push through the lines, but aided by the general in command who happened also to be a Mason, he located his son, who was suffering with bloody dysentery. Through the common bond with the general, he secured permission to take his son home where with his mother's loving care and good food, he soon recovered and returned to his soldierly duties.

This is what war does to the flower of mankind

From Corinth, Vernon's regiment marched through Tennessee, where they spent some time in Pulaski. There they witnessed the sad hanging of a brave young rebel spy, Sam Davis, whose bronze figure on the town square today perpetuates and honors the memory of a young lad, haled from his college to fight for the Confederate cause, the cause which he thought was right. At the call from his general to undertake a dangerous mission, he volunteered. He was commissioned to discover the equipment and intentions of the northern army under General Dodge. With the incriminating papers in his boots he was caught. When on the way to the scaffold, marching to the ominous sound of muffled drums, General Dodge sent a man who galloped into the circle with the message that if young Davis would reveal the name of the man under whose direction he was working, he would give him a reprieve. He scornfully refused saying, "I am doing my duty as a soldier. Now you do yours." He was hanged.

It was on the march to Atlanta that Vernon met his cousin, Harvey J. Skiff, who

was a captain in the Thirteenth Iowa. They had been marching all night, trying to get through a pass on Kenesaw Mountain to prevent the Rebels from getting there first, part of the time on double quick time. The night was black, raining and muddy. At times marching was slow and halting. Vernon discovered that Captain Harvey Skiff's regiment, the Thirteenth Iowa, was passing his own regiment. By constantly calling out, he and Harvey managed to locate each other and exchange sad and hasty greetings.

In the siege of Atlanta, there were many weeks of hard fighting. Sherman had the rebels surrounded. This was in the summer of 1864. Johnston had fortified the city hoping to hold it against Sherman. It was a strategic point of converging railroad supplies for the south. There was attack and counter attack. One night, Vernon and Charley Gilman pitched their "dog tent" on the side of the mountain. During the night, a terrific gale and rainstorm arose carrying away their tent and leaving them lying in rivulets of mud, their blankets and clothing soaked. The rest of the night they lay on a log.

Sherman seized the only railroad that was left to carry supplies to Hood's Confederate army in Atlanta and so compelled Hood to evacuate the city. Hood withdrew under cover of darkness. The next day Sherman telegraphed the news through the country, "Atlanta is ours and fairly won." This was on the second day of September, 1864. They entered the once beautiful but now ruined city, and there they were stationed for some time.

Hood moved his army northward and destroyed the only railroad left to carry sup-

At Atlanta

plies into Atlanta, forcing Sherman's army to live on very meager rations part of the time. Vernon well remembered the feeling of being half starved.

The war was over

The armies maneuvered northward. During the winter, the Third Brigade Band was given a short furlough home. On their return, they marched from Beaufort, North Carolina, toward Richmond. It was in April that they heard the joyous news of the evacuation of Richmond, and knew that the war was over. They marched on to Washington where there was a "grand review of all the armies," and were there discharged on the second day of June, 1865.

Merchants in Newton

Vernon returned to Newton. In the fall he and his father opened a dry goods store in Union Block, on the east side of the square. This was a large business block which had been erected by William R. Skiff, D. L. Clark, and Tom Arthur. On the second floor were offices, and on the third floor was Union Hall, the scene for a number of years of Newton's theatrical entertainments and dances.

Vernon's adventure into merchandising was so successful that as years went on, other departments were added, groceries, carpets, and boots and shoes.

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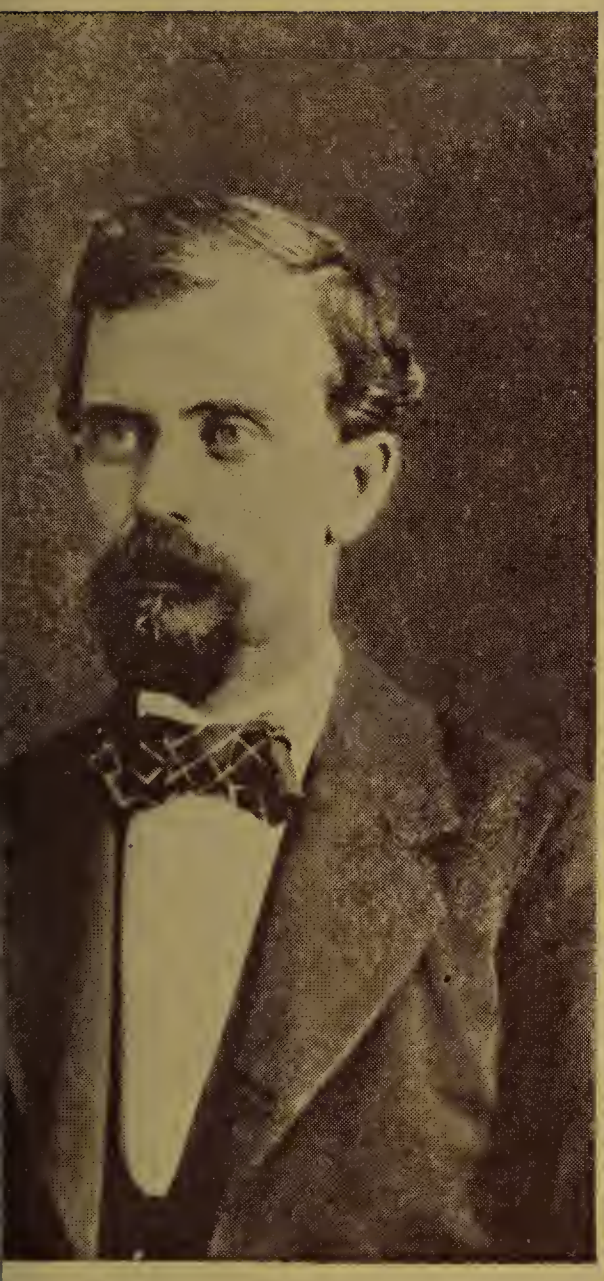


Mr. and Mrs. A. K. Emerson

Their beautiful daughter, Mae Emerson,
aged four years.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary Frances Coffin

Mary Frances Coffin was the daughter of Matthew Starbuck Coffin and Martha Ellen Thompson. On her father's side she came from a long line of Quaker ancestry leading back to the Nantucket Coffins. There were several Quaker preachers among them, both men and women. Some along the line were farmers and a few were whalers. Looking backward over the line, I should say that they were not very good farmers but very excellent preachers. Mary Coffin Starbuck (1644-1717), a daughter of Tristram Coffin, was noted on Nantucket for her superior judgment as well as for "the eloquence and elegance of her oratory," Since her time Quaker preachers have appeared plentifully in the family, many of them gifted. The success of an aunt of Matthew Starbuck Coffin, Priscilla Hunt Coffin, was so outstanding that much has been written concerning her. In 1823 John Ward writes of Priscilla, "Her clear and cogent reasoning, strength of utterance, and beautiful language exceeded expectations. It was the greatest display of oratory that I have ever heard from human lips." Lucretia Coffin Mott, noted abolitionist, was descended from the Nantucket Coffins.

Whaling was a lucrative and vastly interesting occupation of the Nantucketers and many are the breath taking tales which they relate of their whaling experiences. The most arresting story from Nantucket is of the sinking of the "Essex" by a whale in the South Seas, over a thousand miles from land. Only two men returned to tell the tale. The "Essex" sank on the twentieth of November, 1820, and the crew pulled away from the sinking ship in three open boats. Before they were rescued on the eighteenth of the following February their sufferings

were extreme. Most of the men died and survivors resorted, by vote, to cannibalism. It is a tale of the sea, gruesome and true, which surpasses all fiction.

Mary's mother, Martha Thompson, was a woman of exceptional capability, her admirable letters reveal. Martha's mother, Margaret McLoney, was a writer for magazines. Martha's father, Judge John H. Thompson, was a lawyer, judge, senator, and Lieutenant-Governor of Indiana. Martha was a graduate of Mrs. Tivis' School in Louisville, Kentucky, having both some ability in music and talent with her brush.

Mary's childhood

Mary Frances was born October 25, 1842, in Salem, Indiana, at the home of her grandfather Thompson. Her father was in the commission business in New Orleans, in the interest of which he was half owner of a steamboat which plied up and down the Mississippi River between New Orleans and St. Louis. About 1849, he bought his father's old farm, a mile out of Salem, by buying the interests of other heirs. There, under the wide spreading trees, or in the orchard, fragrant with blossoms in the spring, Mary Frances played with her sister Alice and her two small brothers, Charlie and Mattie. That old farm, with its embowered spring house at the foot of the hill where her mother kept the pans of milk and golden butter, was an ever fruitful source of happy reminiscences for Mary Frances. She went to school in Salem, a mile away.

The Coffins were Abolitionists

Matthew Coffin was deeply opposed to slavery. When the problem of slavery arose, the Coffins were particularly clannish. There was not a man in the Coffin family who would not gladly assist a runaway slave on his way to freedom in Canada, and of the same mind were his sisters and

Matthew Starbuck Coffin, in Indianapolis,
aged about forty-two.

Martha Thompson Coffin,
aged about thirty-four.

Mary Frances Coffin, ten years old; Alice Virginia Coffifn, about five and a half years old; Charles Thompson Coffin, about two and a half years old. Picture taken in Indianapolis.

his cousins and his aunts. Levi Coffin, a cousin of Matthew, was termed the President of the Underground Railway. His book of Reminiscences of the thousands of slaves that he assisted on their way to Canada makes rarely interesting reading. In Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, the originals of the kindly Quaker couple who assisted Eliza and her little boy after crossing the Ohio on the ice were Levi Coffin and his wife portrayed as Phineas and Rachel Halliday.

At one time, a slave boy escaped from Kentucky and landed in Salem. Soon his pursuers were after him. They met George Starbuck, an uncle of Matthew Coffin's.

"Oh," said Starbuck, "is it a black boy wearing bluejeans that you are looking for?"

"Yes," they answered eagerly.

"Why, I saw him just this morning by Matthew Coffin's spring house, sitting on a bench under a willow tree," and he gave them specific directions how to go there. They went off in hot haste after their prey, but presently returned, angry and crestfallen not to have seen him even at the vanishing point.

"Well, you found the spring house, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you found the willow tree, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"And you found the bench, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, three truths out of five statements is pretty good for a Starbuck on this occasion," said George, and turned away.

The slave got away.

In the fall of 1854, Mr. Coffin, finding that farming was not sufficiently remuner-

ative, sold his farm and household goods at auction and the family went to the home of Grandfather Thompson in Indianapolis. After recovering from a siege of "fever and ague," Mr. Coffin went to Newton, Iowa, to appraise that section as a future home. The family followed in May, 1855. Housing facilities in the young village were scarce, but they managed to extract two rooms for their family use until they could obtain a small cottage. There Mr. Coffin entered the dry goods business in company with Jehu Lindley. Later he built a brick house south of the square for his family. In July, 1857, occurred the greatest misfortune of his life. He lost his dearly beloved wife, Martha, a blow from which he never really recovered. She left a little baby boy who did not long survive his mother. To give birth to a child in pioneer Iowa in 1857 was a hazardous undertaking, and poor Martha Coffin, a fine, healthy woman, paid the price of the hazard. She died two weeks after the birth of her child, because of unscientific methods in handling such a case in pioneer communities. In the meantime Mr. Coffin's business failed and he was obliged to look elsewhere for fields of endeavor.

Mary lost her mother

Mr. Coffin secured the services of a housekeeper and the children went to school in Newton. Mary grew to young ladyhood there. Mr. Thomas, at Hazel Dell Academy was one of her instructors, and she always spoke highly of his qualifications as a teacher. Soon after the beginning of the Civil War, Mr. Coffin was tendered a position by the government in the transporting of troops and supplies by steamboat down the Misissippi River. He removed his family to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, to avail them-

selves of the privileges of the Iowa Wesleyan University. Mr. Coffin often said that if he could leave his children nothing else, he would give them a good education which nobody could take from them. There they lived during the war, busy with school duties.

Mary returned for a visit to Newton

It was sometime in 1866 that Mary's Uncle Charlie Thompson and wife invited her to go with them for a visit to Newton. She was joyous over the prospect of meeting again her many old friends there. They went to the new Phelps House, on the south side of the square. It was opening with a gala occasion, a dinner and dance at seven dollars a couple, a fabulous price for those days. Vernon had invited another young lady for that festivity, but there, standing in the hall, after all those long years of war, he again saw Molly, the only woman in this whole wide world, he afterwards said to his daughter, that he had ever wanted to be his wife. They greeted each other casually, but with an underlying thrill. After that evening, they saw much of each other and it was during that visit that they plighted their troth.

She returned to Mount Pleasant, then went to the home of her Aunt Eunice Oneal, in Chillicothe, Missouri, to prepare for her marriage. She had no mother and no home of her own, so they went to her father's sister Eunice, where on January 23, 1867, Vernon William Skiff and Mary Frances Coffin were married. As she stood at the window in the early wintry morning with her aunt and watched her lover come up the lane, straight, strong and handsome, her aunt said, "Oh, Mary, you are a lucky girl." And so, indeed, she thought. Neither one

Marriage of Vernon and Mary

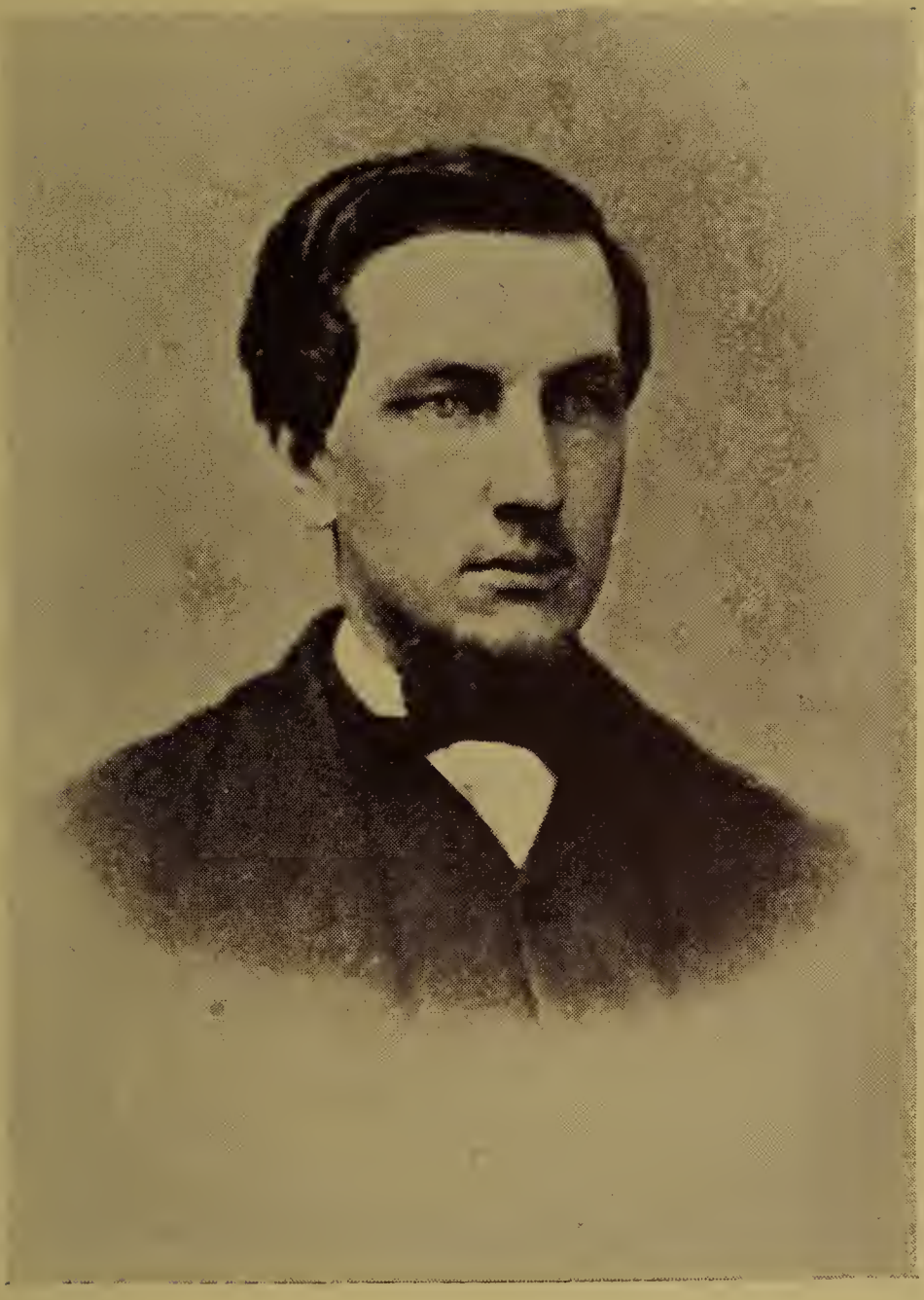
of them were given to ostentatious demonstrations, but as they embarked on their life's journey together, making a wedding trip to Chicago, combining business with pleasure by buying spring supplies for Vernon's store, it is safe to say that no happier twain than they ever smiled at each other with deeper content. An amusing account of the final lap of their journey home was recorded in the Newton Free Press:

"Married in Chillicothe, Mo., Wednesday morning, January 23, by the Rev. W. J. Martindale, Mr. Vernon W. Skiff, of Newton, Iowa, and Mary F., elder daughter of M. S. Coffin, formerly of Mt. Pleasant, Iowa. No cards.—1867.

We wish the happy pair many years of pleasure and prosperity. Their kind remembrance of the printer betokens success in life, as it shows they begin on correct principles.

We clip the following extract from a spicy letter to the Des Moines Statesman by one of its editors. He sees things as they are—except the position of the Free Press. We do not range ourselves on the side of high taxes, unless it be to pay every proper expense incurred by the Government to sustain its own existence against its enemies both North and South.

"We reached Kellogg at dusk. The night was bitter cold, and before us lay a ride of twenty miles, over prairies swept by the most cutting winds. We were told that as the train was considerably behind time on account of the recent storm, we would be obliged to start at once for Monroe, or miss the connection with the train at Des Moines. We determined to let supper go, and make our point at all



Vernon William Skiff

Vernon William Skiff and Mary Frances Coffin, married January 23, 1867, in Chillicothe, Mo.

Mary Frances Coffin

hazards. The stage sledges did not appear at once. A tavern bell rang, filling the clear, cold atmosphere with its melodious notes, accompanied by sundry fumes of beef steak and coffee. The spirit was willing—was decidedly resolute—but the stomach was more potently weak. A true Hawk Eye always "goes with the crowd." The crowd went for a well earned supper, and we did likewise. Four swallows ensued, and the fifth was cut short by the stage horn. Something indefinite was said about "the devil," and the whole party got inside their overcoats, and under their hats in quick style. A rush was made for "good seats." We "made out" well, and were just imagining that all danger of freezing to death was removed, when a stammering groom and blushing bride came upon the stage of action. The lady ousted us with one look; of course we'd just as soon ride with the driver of the other sledge. Didn't make a particle of difference. We floundered through a snow bank, muttering blessings on the new made pair, and seated ourselves close to the heels of a vicious horse and where the "zephyrs" had a fair chance at us, when the cortege moved on. The Spanish Inquisition was a fool to a bare seat on a rickety sledge that crawls slowly over our bleak hills on a bitter cold night. That's what we thought at least. When within about two degress of "freeze to death" point, the current of our comfortable ruminations was interrupted by a delicate squeal from the rear sledge. Uncertain whether the Indians or Regulators had commenced an attack, our party "piled out," and rushed to the rescue—sledge

No railroads in Newton

The "stammering groom and blushing bride" were Vernon and Mary

number 2 was down side up, and securely located on the backs of its former occupants. The "blushing bride" was found closely wedged between her "affectionate husband," and a big, fat steamboatman who had wandered from the Misissippi like a river craft seeking water. Steamboatman on top, of course. After reconstructing the sled, our forward movement began again. Getting tired of having the aforementioned vicious horse firing at our shins so regularly, we changed base, and shared a seat with the other driver. In less than twenty minutes, Sledge No. 1 smashed up, and left its happy passengers in a snow bank, five miles from any visible habitation. Our party had become so far congealed that the majority swore "they didn't give a cent," and we left our fellow sufferers to the tender mercies of the prairie breezes. We reached Newton at nine. At this place many of our number ascertained that the Liuqor Law was fearfully and wonderfully enforced. They concluded to take cold water in their'n.

Newton has every indication of soon becoming a business place. The county seat of Jasper it boasts as fine a court house as can be found in the State. Its citizens are imbued with enterprise, and believing in the advantages of their location, seemed determined to make the most of them. The business of the place is considerable and is constantly increasing. The country surrounding it is well settled with the right kind of men—hardy, industrious, and enterprising. As soon as Newton is connected with the outer world by rail, it will take a leap forward. Not the least significant resource which it has, is

the immense bed of coal which undoubtedly surrounds it. One or two mines are being developed, and are found to contain the best quality of coal. This will make amends for the lack of timber, and will prove a source of vast wealth. Although yet in its infancy, the town supports two well conducted papers—the Banner and the Free Press, the former Democratic, the latter Republican, has just changed hands, having been purchased by Mr. Joshua D. Patton of Davenport, who will at once take possession. Mr. Patton is an old editor and is said to be a master of the quill and its accompaniments. Although he has ranged himself on the side of heavy taxation, and social demoralization, with that fraternal feeling which should mark all editorial intercourse we wish him the height of success and an abundance of Seven Thirties. We left our "happy pair" at Newton. Long may they wave. We hope they made amends for the chill breezes and unfathomable snow bank, and in her new Elysium may the bride soon forget the expressive language which our somewhat exasperated crowd occasionally indulged in at the rudeness of our journey.

Early newspapers in Newton

After a short stay at Newton, we resumed our journey. Our driver, an old employee of the Great Western Stage Company, rejoiced in the nom de plume of "Old Honesty." We afterwards learned the origin of the cognomen and if an honest man is really the noblest work of God, "Old Honesty" should be regarded as a more royal title than that of duke or prince. A traveler once lost a wallet containing $300—the representative of all his earthly possessions. "Hon-

esty" was the lucky finder unknown to any one, but like a relic of two centuries ago, consumed a whole day, in seeking out the disconsolate owner, and after succeeding, restored the property and refused any reward.

We inquired of an old resident, if there were any other men in the section who belonged to the same tribe as "Honesty." "Oh yes, a very great many," was the reply. "They can be distinguished by a small tuft of hair growing in the palms of their hands." We solicited introductions to a number of persons intent on finding some of the tribe but finally arrived at the conclusion that either "Honesty" was the sole survivor or that his brethren had commenced shaving their palm with the utmost regularity. These stage drivers are as much a distinct class as soldiers or sailors. Many of them have followed their dangerous and unpleasant vocation for a score of years. Not a few commenced life in Ohio and Indiana, and as civilization advanced they have been driven still further westward. The iron horse is their enemy and they retire before it. Soon the plains of the far West will be their only home. Some amusing stories were told in regard to the pleasure of staging in early times. One traveler related that he left Keokuk in a splendid coach, drawn by four highly mettled steeds. At the second station, he was transferred to a hack drawn by two sad looking "Crow-baits." At the third station he found a "spring seat" and balky mule. At the fourth station he found two cut-throats prepared to transport him the remainder of the way on a rail. One of our number swore he would

Stella Skiff at the age of four years.

Children of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon W. Skiff.

Frank Vernon Skiff, about four years old.

Blanche Alice Skiff, about four years

Union Block and the east side of the Square in the 1870s. John Meyer standing in front of his grocery store, "Sol" Gardner and Mr. Chapman in the drug store and William Vaughn and his son Henry among others in front of the hardware store V. W. Skiff and Co. is over the Dry Goods sign.

HOME OF WILLIAM R. SKIFF, BUILT IN 1858

Standing by the fence, left to right: Lizzie Emerson, her daughter Mae, William Skiff, Frank Skiff, Stella Skiff, Blanche in the carriage, Vernon and Mary Skiff. Abigail Skiff on the porch.

exchange the seat he then occupied for a good rail any time, if the splinters were picked off the latter and it was well warmed. Only a matter of taste and pantaloon."

The newly married couple first lived with Vernon's parents in the Skiff home that Mary learned to love so well, and the affection that grew between her and her husband's mother is beautiful to remember. It discounts all the typical tales of mother-in-law relationships. Mary's heart welcomed a real mother, from whom she learned the arts of housekeeping and home making for her own mother had died when she was but fourteen years of age. Neatness and orderliness, that mother had transmitted to her by heredity. A wedding reception was given by Vernon's parents in honor of his young wife, in which she was very resplendent in a new garnet silk gown which was the latest mode in Chicago.

Their children

In this home were born their first two children, Stella, and Frank Vernon. With their family increased to four, they decided it was time to have a home of their own, and they moved into a house in North Newton, south of the D. L. Clark home. There, their third and last child was born, Blanche Alice. Soon after, they moved into the Isaiah Wilson house, one block east of Vernon's old home and were happy to be back again in the familiar neighborhood. It was about 1876 that William gave to his son one half of his lot for the purpose of building a new home. The corn cribs were torn down and the new house erected, which was capacious and ample for their growing family. Before it was finished, however, they were obliged to relinquish the Wilson

Living in the barn was a great lark

house, as the owner was returning to Newton, so Vernon established his family in their new barn which had just been completed. Their children thought it quite a lark, living in the barn and neighbors must have thought so too, for there was a "surprise party," a taffy pulling affair, much to the delight of the children, in which Cordy Lindley Blanchard made great fun and scored quite a hit in some old fashioned clothes.

They moved into their new home during the winter. Those were happy years. Business was good. Mary said, "On Saturdays, when the farmers came to town, there wasn't room in the store to turn around." Diversions were manifold and various, of the character of Uncle Tom's Cabin, in Union Hall, Black Blind Tom, whose digital facility on the piano was more remarkable for his blindness, or the midgets, Tom Thumb and his wife, with little Minnie Warren.

Circus day in Newton

But when the circus came to town there was a gala day. The square was packed with people. The farmers came in with their families, and from the ten o'clock parade till the dark of night there was great excitement. Vernon and Mary had promised to take the children to the circus in the evening. For weeks the youngsters had carefully studied the billboards and knew by heart the name of every beautiful Madamoiselle who danced so unbelievably in tarlatan skirts on the back of a horse, or on a tight rope. That day was an eternity. Evening would never come. Most of the day the children stood at the corner of their fence listening to the magic strains that came faintly from the circus grounds four blocks away. A new dress for Stella, new

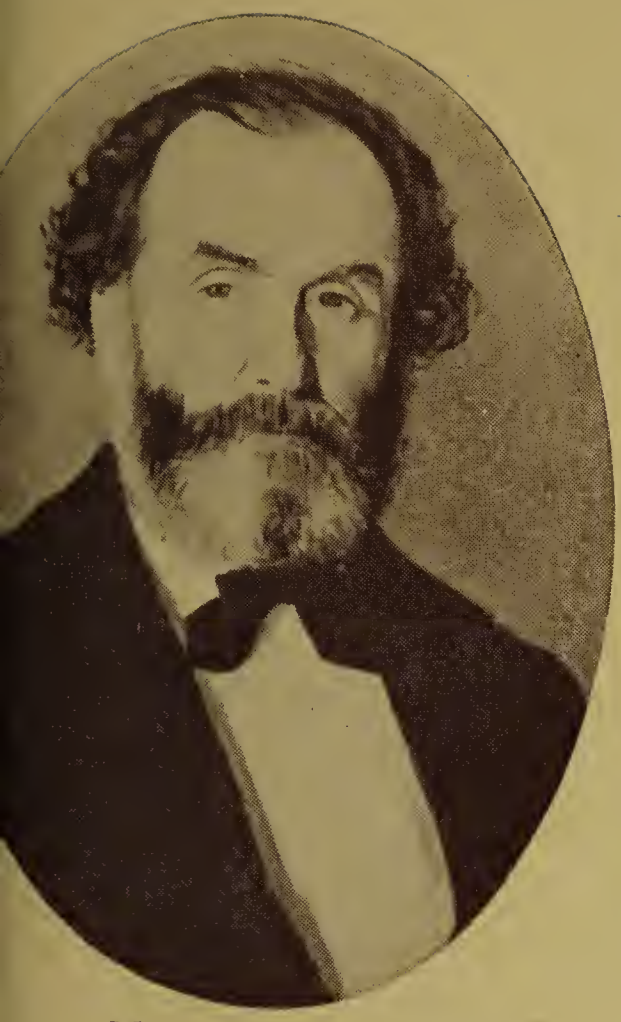
shoes and a new hat with a lovely wreath of flowers were neatly laid out, waiting for the roll of the hands of the clock. At length the family emerged from the house. "Dear me," said Mary, "those clouds look like rain," and she hurried back for an umbrella. Once inside of those enchanting tents, the moments fairly galloped along. There were peanuts for the children but Mary looked distrustfully at the pink lemonade. Soon they were seated in front of the circle. The band was playing. The clowns were a scream and diversions unfolded in rapid succession. "Oh, look, look! There she is — my Madamoiselle — No, the other one—Well, it's hard to tell—but really and truly beautiful. Did you see that? Dancing on top of a horse—Oh, look, she actually did it." Moments of unutterable satisfacfaction. The band stopped playing. Madamoiselle rested. In the hush a gentle patter on the roof of the tent was heard. "There, it is raining," said Mary apprehensively, and in a few moments the gentle patter became a torrent and just back of them the tent was leaking bucketfuls. They moved to other seats, but the umbrella was serviceable. Something wild was going on outside of the circus. The lights went out. The wind was rising. The tents began to swell and sway more and more violently. "Oh, we must get out of this in a hurry," said Vernon and they grasped the hands of their children. There was a mad rush for the exits as the storm broke in all of its fury. Outside the tents there was a slough of mud everywhere. The lightning flashes were blinding. How they ever got home alive was a marvel to the children. But once safely at home, Stella began an inventory of her new adornments. "Oh. my

poor hat," she wailed. It was a sorry looking article. The next morning the streets were strewn with leaves and limbs of trees but the circus was "gone with the wind." The memory of the storm soon died away but other memories remained very vividly with the children and amazing were the circuses enacted in the Skiff yard that summer. There was tight rope walking—on a rail fence. Frank ventured a rope but the clothesline broke. There were prancing steeds (sticks) cavorting around in a circle with a beautiful madamoiselle in imaginary tarlatan skirts doing incredible stunts to the applause of imaginary audiences. One's first day at the circus was an unforgettable event.

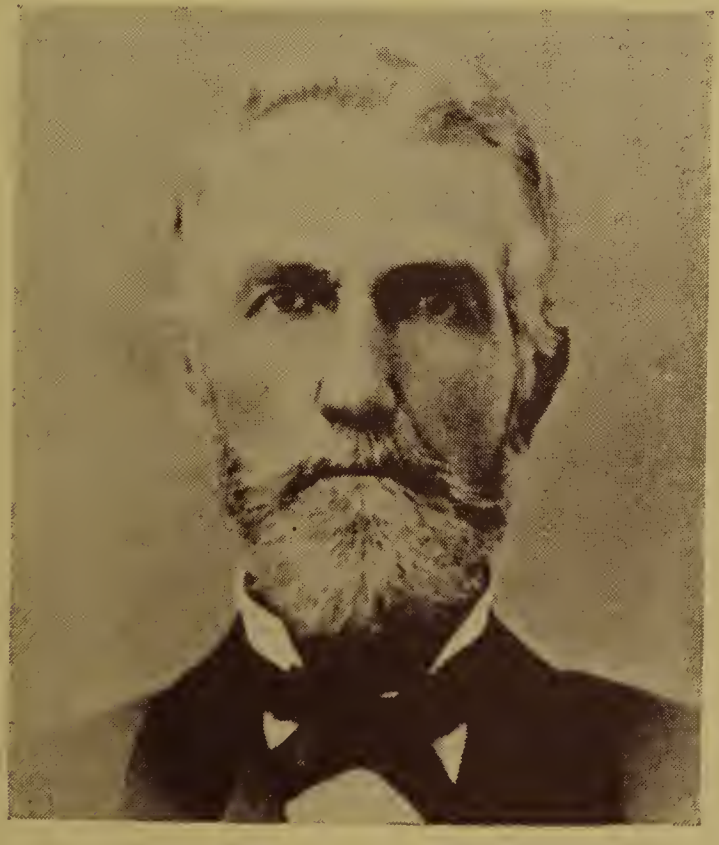
Farming

Finding that close confinement in his store was impairing his health, Vernon sold his general merchandise business and bought a farm about six miles northeast of town. It was called the Failor farm. The family continued to live in town, but for some time he drove daily to the farm to superintend its development. At the same time, his father was interested in improving a farm in Nebraska, near Unadilla. Together, they bought cattle on range in Wyoming from Alec Swan, of Cheyenne, paying $12.50 and $20.00 a head for them. They were fattened on range and after the yearly roundup, they were sold in Chicago at $27.50 a head. Vernon had an interesting experience one year in participating in the roundup. Swan met him at the train in Cheyenne, but apologetically explained to him that it would be impossible for him to return immediately to the ranch, twenty miles away. Placing the reins of the ponies in Vernon's hands, Swan said, "Just let the ponies have the reins. They know the way and will take you right

A cattle roundup



Mr. and Mrs. William R. Skiff, living in Newton in 1870.
(Copies of the oil paintings by Zephaniah Fenno)



Matthew Starbuck Coffin, living
in Newton in 1878.

Mae Emerson, about sixteen years old.

straight to the ranch." The ponies started at a mad gallop, over mounds of tin cans, over hills. Vernon pulled at the reins with all of his strength until his arms ached, thinking every moment that the buckboard would bounce him up and the earth by gravitation pull him down. No obstacle halted them. Finally, he was obliged to relax his pull. In an incredibly short time, considering the distance, but after the wildest ride of his experience, the ponies drew up at a barn. They were at home, in a lather, but contented.

Family life

For William and Abbie, those were years in which the fullness of life crowned like a blessing their former toil and striving. They had won the high respect of their neighbors, the fidelity of their friends, and the abiding love of their family, with whom they were in close daily contact. Their hopes were fulfilled. Their daughter, Lizzie, with her husband, Mr. Emerson, and their daughter, Mae, lived with them in their home, their son Vernon and his family on the next corner. Of evenings, to go to Grandma's was "up to the other house," or, all gathered around the cheery hard coal base burner in Vernon's sitting room, where, perhaps, Grandpa Coffin gave an interesting account of some book he was reading. Books were his companions. Or Grandpa Skiff narrated some thrilling incident of his hunting expeditions. One tale lingers in the memory of a granddaughter in which he, with three other men went hunting in the wild prairie country of northern Iowa and almost perished in a blizzard. Nature must have claimed this granddaughter for the arms of Morpheus before the tale was ended for she has no remembrance of what they did to save themselves in their direful dilemma.

Such blizzards as they had in the early days are not possible in Iowa today. Every grove and building and planted tree is a wind break, but in the 1850's, the blast swept unfettered across the wide prairies and for a man to be caught in such a storm far from human habitation was almost certain death. Did they build high banks of snow to protect themselves and their horses from the cutting blasts of wind, or would they depend upon constant movement to protect them from the penetrating cold?

"His word was as good as his bond"

The gift of honesty was William's by heritage. "His word was as good as his bond," was constantly said of him. Everybody around the county called him Uncle Billy. He won and retained their utmost confidence in his integrity.

In those early days Abbie's parlor was generally closed in winter, a cold and darkened place, but on Christmas and other family gatherings, it was a place of light and warmth and geniality. Uncle Billy was a jovial soul, fond of music and dancing. His granddaughter well remembers seeing him do a gay old-fashioned jig. She thought it was very funny, with his coat tails flying.

Music lessons for the granddaughters

He urgently encouraged his granddaughters to practice well their piano. New music books, new songs, and even a "cute little pig" were offered as incentives. The "cute little pig" grew to monstrous proportions without any effort on their part and though it lost its beauty it netted them a fine sum for their bank which after all, wasn't much appreciated. Their piano teacher was Lucy Ent, the pretty daughter of one of their valued neighbors, Mrs. Jehu Lindley. Lucy afterwards married Mr. Henry Vaughan and theirs was the first wedding that her

music pupils ever attended. William still thought it important for girls to learn to knit and offered Mae and Stella a five dollar gold piece fresh from the California gold mines, for a pair of socks of their knitting. The socks finally materialized, but when it came to turning the heel. Grandma did most of the turning.

In Abbie's parlor was a very lovely set of rose-carved mahogany furniture which is still in the family, divided, but much prized in these days of pursuit of the "antique." The furniture was at first covered with black horsehair cloth, popular at that time, and later, with red plush. On the walls hung the very fine oil paintings of William and Abbie Skiff, of Abel and Lizzie Emerson and a life-size portrait of their beautiful daughter Mae at the age of five years. They were not consciously aping Boston's "family pride" in venturing into the aesthetic field of family portraits, but a sanguine artist, Zephaniah Fenno, arrived in Newton and proved to be a very excellent painter. Several families availed themselves of his services, including Mr. and Mrs. S. G. Smith and daughter Addie. Many of his paintings were very fine portraits.

William never went to church, perhaps because there was nothing there that met his persuasion. He was wont to say, "A church on every corner—too much money for one day in the week." He would have been much interested could he have known of the progress which adult education is making today in the opening of our churches and schools for lectures, forum platforms, classes for adults. The day is not far distant when the adult of all classes, whether foreign or native, may pursue education all

his life. Education is never finished so long as the mind is active, and classes of every kind in our Public Schools, all day and every day, may in the future be available for ages from six to seventy. Such a day is envisioned by the Works Progress Administration.

Liberal religious tendencies

In early years Abbie was a member of the Presbyterian Church and had read the Bible from "kiver to kiver" many times. In her childhood, the hell and damnation theory was so recurrent a topic that she held her little hand close to the fire to see how it would feel to be burned forever. Later, not being a very good sleeper, as she sat by the lamp light reading her Bible her husband must have his little joke with her. "Now, if only your conscience were as good as mine, you wouldn't have any trouble getting to sleep." Back in New York State, the family had experienced personal knowledge of John Ingersoll's horrific pulpit fulminations in which Satan was very ominously present, to the effect that when later his son Robert maintained that the universe is governed by law, that cause and effect are everywhere operative, in the mental as well as in the physical field, the Skiff family echoed hearty approval. When Rev. D. H. Rogan divided the Congregational Church of Newton by his too great liberality, a few of the Skiff family were among those who followed him to the Universalist Church.

From somewhere back in the line, there had descended upon William R. Skiff the spirit of the nonconformist. The excessive nervousness over human error that afflicted his early environment simply "didn't set with his make up." Without having read

himself into invincible convictions, his were, possibly, a sort of mild Unitarianism, quite utilitarian, and with a "sweet reasonableness" all his own. He felt that human beings were very liable to err in spite of all caution and that it was healthier to regard errors as correctives for the future while going forward with a light heart.

Loyal devotion to his family

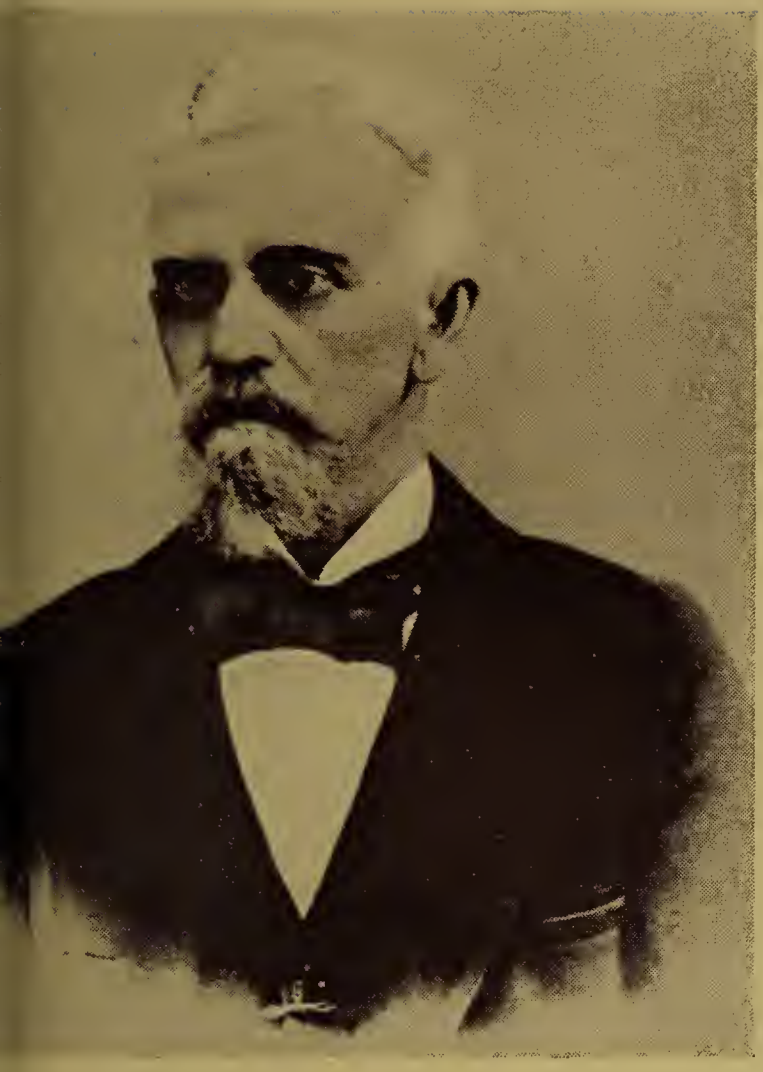
His affection for his family was strong, both filial and paternal. There was in him a reserve power, dominant and potent, which constantly expressed itself in giving a helping hand to his mother and sisters and later to his children. A friend in need met a response from both William and Abbie which was undemonstrative but practical and effective. He was a devoted husband and father, and a loyal friend. Family affection is the vestibule to a whole stock of noble attributes in which human nature expresses itself and through which the good old Yankee self-interest has buttressed itself into a cherished national characteristic and policy, freedom for indivindual initiative.

William was a Mason from his early years, as was also his son. He served his community in positions of trust, but neither he nor his son were inclined to seek public favor in political emoluments. Though in his later years, his hand was munificent, he disliked extravagance and recommended the policy of saving. One precept which was never forgotten he gave to his son as he was launching into the business world. "Never gamble," he said. "A man with the responsibility of a family on his shoulders has no moral right to wantonly gamble away one dollar of his money." Vernon, accepting this advice as proceeding from the

wisdom of a wider experience, never deviated from its principle. He enjoyed his game of cards with his friends, but they soon knew that if a hazard were placed upon the game, he was out of it.

The hand of death

In the spring of 1881, William was giving a vigorous enthusiasm to the development of his Nebraska farm. His grandchildren were pressed into service to gather bushels of maple seeds which were shipped to Nebraska. On May 23, after spending the day planting seeds, though very tired, he was in excellent spirits. During the night, he was seized with a severe pain around the heart, and passed quietly away on Thursday, May 26. During the next decade the grim hand of death was extended into those two households too often. Four years after the death of William, on December 30, 1885, he was followed by his wife, Abbie. She was buried on New Year's Day. On June 25, 1889, their only daughter, Lizzie, Mrs. A. K. Emerson, entered that 'bourne from whence no traveler returns.' Mary also was called upon to relinquish two loved ones, her father, Matthew Starbuck Coffin, on March 10, 1884, and her sister, Alice Virginia Coffin, one of the founders of the P. E. O. Society, on July 28, 1888. These deaths left a great vacuum in the hearts of Vernon and Mary. They closed their house, shipped a portion of their furniture to Chicago and in an unpretentious "flat" on the West Side they spent a few years in the great metropolis, seeking educational and cultural advantages for their children. After the marriage of their eldest daughter, Stella, on July 23, 1893, to Signor Alfredo A. Jannotta, her musical maestro, the yellowing leaves of autumnal days lured Vernon and Mary back



A. K. Emerson

Mrs. A. K. Emerson

Vernon W. Skiff, living in Newton in 1885.

Mary Frances Skiff, picture taken in Chicago about 1896.

to their Iowa home, leaving their children in Chicago, Frank engaged with the Indian Tea Co., and Blanche at Northwestern University. Vernon sold both his Failor farm and the one in Nebraska. He erected a business block on the south side of the Square called the V. W. Skiff block. A few years later found them once more in the old Skiff house which they loved so well. Vernon bought it from his niece, Mrs. Mae Emerson Campbell, in 1896, having sold his own home to Mr. Frank Morgan. They lived there many years, enjoying their lifelong friends, making each year their sojourn to Florida, visiting their children in Chicago, en route. It was on February 8, 1899, that their daughter Blanche married Frank Pierce Ross, freight agent for the Iowa Central Railway, in Newton. Their son Frank married a charming young widow, Ida Rowe Finnegan, on May 29, 1900, and their niece, Mae, married Harry E. Eulass in April, 1899.

Back in the old Skiff home

It was during these years that Frank Skiff, with new ideas for a tea and coffee business that he felt had every possibility of success and an unlimited field for expansion, was formulating in his mind plans and policies to carry those ideas into effect. He placed the matter before his father, who saw at once their great possibilities. Just at this time Frank Ross had severed his former business connection with the Iowa Central Railroad and was looking for a new field of endeavor, so together they organized a new tea and coffee business which they called The Jewel Tea Company. Its first years were fraught with days of long and arduous labor, coupled with brave and stringent self-denial, but gradually the

The Jewel Tea Company is born

vision of its promise began to be fulfilled and it became one of the largest retail tea and coffee enterprises in the world. Vernon sold his business block in Newton to invest in the Jewel Tea Building in Chicago.

It was in 1909 that Vernon and Mary moved into their new home in Oak Park, Illinois, to be near their children, all of whom were living in that Chicago suburb. There never could be a home so dear to the heart of Mary as that old Skiff home in Newton but the call of their children was insistent and they followed it. There for the remainder of their years they lived in close and happy communion with all of their children and grandchildren who gave to them the adoration and respect which they so richly deserved. Every winter they sought the softer climate of Florida, or occasionally California, as had been their wont since 1894. It was in Florida in the beautiful Poinciana Hotel in Palm Beach that they celebrated one of the happiest events in the annals of their life together, their Golden Wedding Anniversary on January 23, 1917. There were gathered about them all of their children and their children's children, who left their schools and colleges to pay their loving homage to grandparents that had grown very dear and close to them. Their niece, Mae Eulass, was with them and a few other warm friends. As they gathered about the long dinner table in that brilliant dining room, all eyes were centered on the venerable couple who had for so many years been their guiding stars, their mentors. Mary was gowned in creamy silk, gold-embroidered, with her halo of white hair crowning her head like a diadem. She was beautiful, not only to partial eyes with grateful memories of past devotion, but like

The Golden Wedding

The gathering of the clan at Palm Beach for the great event, the Golden Wedding of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon W. Skiff, on the twenty-third of January, 1917.

Standing, left to right: Joe E. Jannotta, Frank Skiff Jannotta, Mae Emerson Eulass, Frank Vernon Skiff, his wife, Ida Rowe Skiff, A. Vernon Jannotta, and Frank Pierce Ross. Seated: Stella Skiff Jannotta, Mary Frances Skiff, Vernon Skiff, and Blanche Skiff Ross. On the ground: Mildred and Verna Mary Ross.

a rare and delicate piece of Dresden china, despite age and wrinkles, softened by the evening lights, truly beautiful in outline, grace and dignity. During the dinner an unexpected incident occurred. Vernon rose, straight and handsome, though it was his seventy-sixth birthday, and with glass raised, he began, "I pledge a toast to my sweetheart of fifty years, to me the dearest and fairest in all this world." It was a complete surprise to all of his family. Verbal embellishment was a lure that was foreign to his nature, which clearly bore the unmistakable stamp of the broad prairies that nourished him, plain and direct, intolerant of picturesque pretensions. He continued quietly and without effusion to tell us what her companionship had meant to him through these many years, through trials and through joys, always steadfast in her encouragement, her sympathetic understanding always an unfailing source of strength.

When he had finished there was a lump in every throat and a tear in every eye.

An account of their Golden Wedding was written in the Newton Record by Tommy Rodgers who had known them in their youth.

WEDDED FOR FIFTY YEARS

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon W. Skiff Celebrate Golden Wedding

Mr. and Mrs. Vernon W. Skiff, who were both natives of Newton, and who were married January 23, 1867, and spent most of their married life here, until they moved to Chicago a few years ago, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their marriage at their winter home at the Poinciana Hotel, West Palm Beach, Flo-

rida. Their children, Frank V. Skiff, president of the Jewel Tea Co., a large corporation with headquarters at Chicago; Mrs. Stella S. Jannotta and Mrs. Frank P. Ross, both of Oak Park, Illinois, were all present at the family dinner, which was followed by calls and congratulations from many friends and also by an evening reception.

Among the older residents of Newton there was no family better known than that of the Skiffs. Mr. Skiff's father, William R. Skiff, was one of the pioneer merchants of Newton and a very successful man, and his old home, now owned by the son V. W., was the best in Newton and always a social center of the town.

Mrs. Skiff was Miss Mary Coffin, daughter of Mathew Coffin, of the firm of Coffin & Lindley, a pioneer dry goods firm, also very prominent in the business life of the town. She was attending Wesleyan College at Mt. Pleasant at the time and was married at the home of a relative in another city, but the reception took place at the Skiff mansion at this place and was the great social event of the year. There are a few here yet who were guests at the reception 50 years ago, and recall the brilliant event of that early day. Among them were Mrs. Cree Clark Lister, Mr. and Mrs. Lee Westbrook—the latter then Mrs. Emma Townsend—Mrs. Ella Rodgers Townsend, Mrs. Addie Townsend Howard and T. M. Rodgers. One of them tells us that he remembers how beautiful the bride was in her rich garnet colored silk dress, and how proud Vern was of his bride.

Mr. and Mrs. Skiff spent many happy

years in Newton, but they moved about ten years ago to Chicago, where the business interests of the family are and where they have a palatial home. They still have a host of friends among the older residents here, who hope that many years may be granted to them and that these years may be full of happiness.

Last Days

Mary's character appears to be a natural culmination of her long line of descent through Quaker ancestry. In her could be discerned the type of mentality which made the Society of Friends a significant force in our social milieu, an incontrovertible and perplexing embarrassment to the military-minded historian.

The peace maker

None knew better than she how to allay ruffled tempers or divert a storm cloud. She was a born peace maker. She was always ready to hear the other side, to catch the opposing viewpoint, to be kindly just and generously forbearing. To be neat and orderly were traits inherited from her parents. Like her father, she was quiet, retiring, and unostentatious. She was fond of reading. From the immediacy of her home, she could look out upon the larger national and world issues, but always with the same inclination to search for the white flag.

As she was lying in her coffin and Vernon stood looking down upon the still figure, with the tears rolling down his cheeks, he said to his daughter Stella, "I don't believe that woman ever spoke a cross word to me in her life,"—and that after fifty-two years of life together.

She died on the thirtieth day of December, 1918, at her home in Oak Park, Illinois, just thirty-three years to the day af-

ter the death of Abigail Skiff, her dearly loved mother-in-law. She was buried in the Newton Cemetery on New Year's Day.

Over her last resting place her husband erected a tombstone upon which are engraved these immortal lines of Robert Ingersoll:

> "Love is the only bow on life's dark cloud. It is the morning and the evening star. It shines upon the babe, and sheds its radiance on the quiet tomb. It is the Mother of Art, inspirer of poet, patriot and philosopher. It is the air and light to tired souls—builder of every home, kindler of every fire on every hearth. It was the first to dream of immortality. It fills the world with melody—for music is the voice of love. Love is the magician, the enchanter that changes worthless things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. It is the perfume of that wondrous flower, the heart, and without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than beasts; but with it, earth is heaven and we are gods."

After the death of Mary, a deep loneliness settled upon Vernon. His children did all in their power to engage and cheer him but there are always moments in every life when the utter aloofness of the human soul is poignantly felt. Many a day he returned to his lonely hearth and sitting with his head buried in his hands, be wept bitter tears.

As early as matters could be arranged, he went to Palm Beach to escape the winter's cold and to be with his son Frank, whose congenial companionship had been for many years past a source of deep grati-

fication to him. Their tastes and natures were much alike and their business interests were interlocking. They spent many contented hours conversing and planning together. Frank enjoyed his father's companionship more than any of his friends. They played golf together and he joined Frank and Ida at dinner at the Royal Poinciana Hotel where Ida kept up a running fire of spicy comment on all of the little somebodies in gorgeous array who were the cynosure of all the little nobodies in still more gorgeous array. But, though he was a bit amused in that atmosphere of glitter and pomp, there was a touch of disdain in his reaction. He felt that snobbishness, pretense and affectation sits only on the narrow shoulders of small natures. He wrote a letter to his daughter Stella which was entirely characteristic of him.

Hotel Royal Poinciana
Palm Beach, Florida, Feb. 14, 1920

My Dear Stella:

Have heard through Blanche that Frank has been quite sick, but is up and at work again. Hope you will keep clear of the flu.

Didn't like too much style

Well the old hotel is full, every nook and corner. The show is on. The insanely stylish are here in force. We take dinner from 7:30 to 8:30 and see the idiots pass in review. It is possibly worth seeing, but not too often. It is very expensive to be in the swim. Every negro and employee will bow and bend the knee if you hand out the dough. It takes money, brains not needed.

I certainly enjoy golf and the warm climate, but if I could find a good homelike place, with less style and handy to

golf, would like it much better. The evenings drag and I spend most of them in my room playing solitaire. The fountain pen gave out so will finish with the pencil. With lots of love to you and all the family,

Truly,
V. W. Skiff

During the summers, his daughter Blanche, whose home was a block away, gave her unremitting and devoted attention to her father's needs, and her husband, Frank Ross, was continually planning for his comfort. All of their family activities centered around his interests. Blanche's noble, generous nature was his constant source of reliance and cheer. There were family dinners and drives in the country. There were family picnics which were great sport for his grandchildren and his great-grandchildren.

The Skiff Memorial Hospital

A few month's after Mary's death, Vernon's attention was drawn to the great need of Newton and vicinity for an adequate and modern hospital. After due deliberation he decided to build and endow such an institution to be named The Mary Frances Skiff Memorial Hospital. Working in conjunction with the citizens of Newton, including Fred L. Maytag, Harry B. Alfree, Mrs. Jay Clark and others, the building was finally completed and dedicated. That building stands today a monument to the great desire of Vernon W. Skiff to honor his wife, Mary Frances Skiff, in offering to their old home community a hospital with open doors and a trained and efficient personnel to relieve human pain and suffering regardless of race, creed or color.

It was in the winter of 1921-22 that his

Mary Frances Skiff Memorial Hospital, Newton, Iowa

daughter Stella began to make the yearly pilgrimage with him to Florida. His eyes were failing him. A cataract was slowly forming over one of his eyes. During those years, the hours in which his daughter read to him were the golden hours of his day. It was in the spring of 1924 that they decided to investigate the central part of Florida. They landed in Lake Wales, on the "Ridge." Vernon said, "Well, here I have been coming to Florida for thirty years, and didn't know there was a hill in Florida. Both of the coasts are flat." But there they found undulating hills with miles of lush orange groves scenting the air with their redolent blossoms, and nestling in every declivity, were lovely blue lakes, clear and spring fed, that rivalled in beauty the blue Italian lakes of which poets have sung so agreeably for years. After that, Lake Wales was their Florida objective. It was much more quiet and "homey." It suited his inclination better than Palm Beach.

It was in June, 1924, in New York City, that the cataract was quite successfully removed from his eye. That was a joyful moment when he found the sight of his eye restored. A moderate amount of reading was again possible.

A keen mind at eighty-five

On the twenty-third of January, 1926, he rounded his eighty-fifth year. That milestone was celebrated with a birthday dinner at Kenilworth Lodge in Sebring, Florida, forty miles from Lake Wales, with as many of the family as were in the vicinity and some friends of many years standing. It was a happy occasion. As we sat on the veranda enjoying the flowers and the blue lake, Vernon repeated to us from memory

every line of William Knox's verses, "Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" It was exceedingly impressive as he said:

"Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?
Like a swift-fleeting meteor, a fast flying cloud,
A flash of lightning, a break of the wave,
Man passes from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall moulder to dust and together shall lie.

The infant a mother attended and loved,
The mother that infant's affections who proved,
The husband that mother and infant who blessed,
Each, all are away to their dwellings of rest.

The maid on whose cheek, on whose brow, in whose eye
Shone beauty and pleasure — her triumphs are by;
And the memory of those who loved her and praised,
Are alike from the minds of the living erased.

The hand of the king that the sceptre hath borne;
The brow of the priest that the mitre hath worn;
The eye of the sage and the heart of the brave,
Are hidden and lost in the depths of the grave.

The peasant, whose lot was to sow and to reap;
The herdsman, who climbed with his goats up the steep;
The beggar, who wandered in search of his bread,
Have faded away like the grass that we tread.

The saint who enjoyed the communion of heaven,
The sinner who dared to remain unforgiven,
The wise and the foolish, the guilty and just,
Have quietly mingled their bones in the dust.

So the multitude goes, like the flowers and the weed
That withers away to let others succeed;
So the multitude comes, even those we behold,
To repeat every tale that has often been told.

For we are the same our fathers have been;
We see the same sights our fathers have seen—
We drink the same stream and view the same sun,
And run the same course our fathers have run.

The thoughts we are thinking our fathers would think;
From the death we are shrinking our fathers would shrink;
To the life we are clinging they also would cling;
But it speeds for us all, like a bird on the wing.

They loved, but the story we can not unfold;
They scorned, but the heart of the haughty is cold.
They grieved, no wail from their slumbers will come,
They joyed, but the tongue of their gladness is dumb.

They died, aye, they died; and we things that are now,
Who walk on the turf that lies over their brow,
Who make in their dwelling a transient abode,
Meet the things that they met on their pilgrimage road.

Yea, hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
We mingle together in sunshine and rain;
And the smiles and the tears, the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
From the bosom of health to the paleness of death;
From the gilded saloon to the bier and the shroud;
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud?"

It was in April following that memorable birthday that our dear father left us. We were keeping house in an apartment in Lake Wales, Florida. He had a very bad heart attack and we decided that he required the attention of experts in the north. Landing in Chicago in the raw April air, he contracted pneumonia. He was very sick. One day he called me to his bed and said, "Stella, I don't believe I am going to get well, and if I were convinced I would just sit up and have a good smoke." I begged him to give himself every chance. Blessed father. He was a thorough rationalist and could face death bravely and unafraid. He

died on April 29, 1926, at his home in Oak Park and was buried in Newton on May Day by the side of his life partner, "where" as he said, "our bones may mingle in the dust with our life long companions and be friends through all time."

His word was as good as his bond

Vernon Skiff, like his father, commanded the high respect of all with whom he had business dealings. In the unfortunate Wichita boom where he and many Newton friends suffered losses, it became necessary for some one to go to Wichita to look after their joint investments. One wrote, "Let us trust our business with Vern, because we all have confidence in Vern." Like his father, it was said of him, "His word is as good as his bond," and the same thing was said of his son Frank when he died, June 3, 1933, in New York City. Governor Lehman, of New York, with whom Frank had had many business dealings, as well as his colleagues in The Jewel Tea Company, spoke of Frank in that vein.

Father and son

Vernon was not the "teetotaler" that his father was. He and Mary sometimes made their own wine from grapes. He smoked cigars which in later years the doctors cautioned him to curtail on account of their effect on his heart. He sometimes displayed temper, and Mary's serene nature was just the leaven that made it possible for them to spend fifty-two tranquil years together in a home atmosphere that lingers in the happy remembrance of their children as a port of refuge and content.

Vernon became much interested in astronomy and as a dilettante, made quite a study of it. He delighted to talk of the stars and could very interestingly relate many wonders of the sky. But perhaps his

greatest interest in his later years was that religion should be rationalized and humanized. He felt that a religion founded on the myths and fables of man's early attempts to explain the great and unsolved mysteries of our universe could not today adequately meet the growing complexities of our modern life. There was an age when the mould of human testimony ran overwhelmingly to dreams and miracles, but science is the miracle worker today and we know that nothing is fixed and final.

> New occasions teach new duties,
> Time makes ancient good uncouth,
> He must upward still and onward
> Who would keep abreast of Truth.

Vernon passed his eighty-fifth birthday with a mind still keenly alert with interest in the larger affairs of life and as handsome and straight as a man of sixty. His family constantly sought his advice because they recognized the wisdom of his opinions, which inspired confidence. Good judgment is the supreme test of character and old age is its confirmation.

SKIFF — FATHER AND SON

TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

No, they were not famed
In the benefactions which science
Has conferred upon humanity,
Nor great in world's acclaim;
Not speaking to listening multitudes,
Scrolling large their name,
But in home and family—great,
In loyalty and love,
In thought and service,
In wise council,
In generous and tireless devotion.

He, not averse to "the wrestling thews
That throw the world,"
Its turbulence, its satisfactions,
Its many trials,
Which he carried home to her.

She, met them with sympathy,
With inspiring understanding.
Bred in Quaker trends
She was a haven of peace
From a world of strife.

In Youth, love is romantic, curious, hopeful.
After more than fifty years
Of life together, in daily contact,
If love abounds, steadfast through toil,
Through lights and shadows,
It is a shining halo,
Shedding its glory over all who meet it.
Love for a year, a day, is easy.
Love for a lifetime requires
Efficiency, patience, judgment, character.
It makes life worth living.
Labor and love together bring happiness,
The end and aim of all effort.

Skeptics, listen—you who say
There is no such thing
As love for a lifetime.
I cite you my father and mother.
He was her fortress of strength,
She was his haven of peace
For more than fifty years
Until death parted them.

Love was the golden cord which bound them;

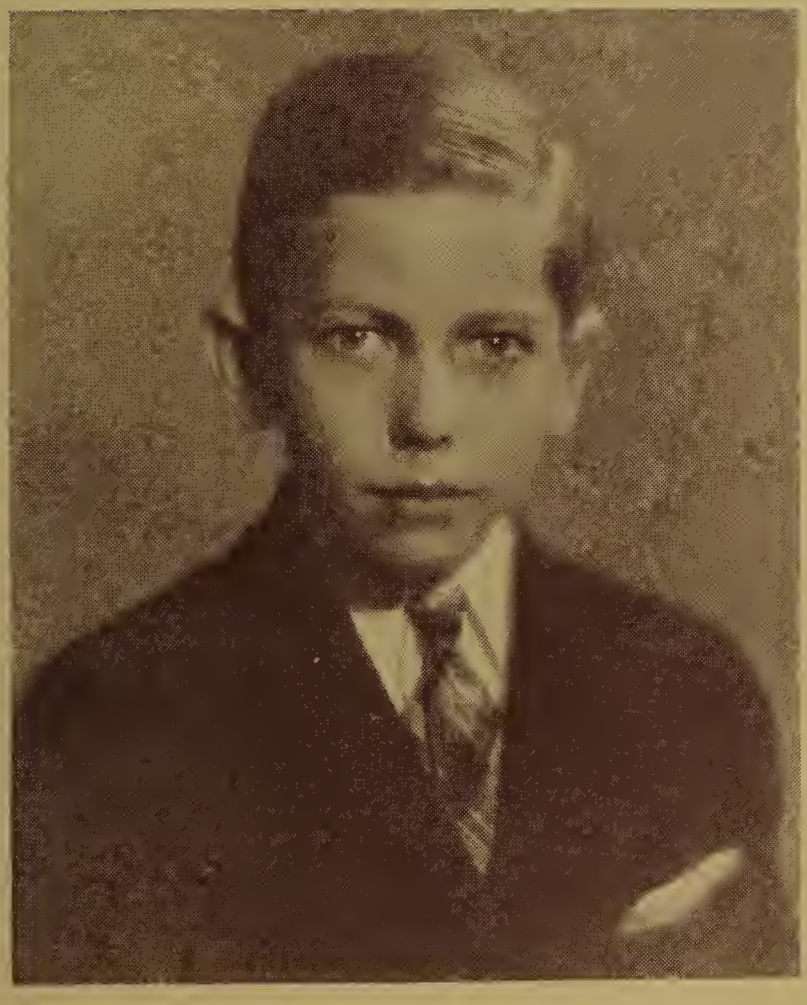
Loyalty was innate in their biological strain.
The tendency is a heritage.

—Stella Skiff Jannotta

ENTER MY GRANDCHILDREN

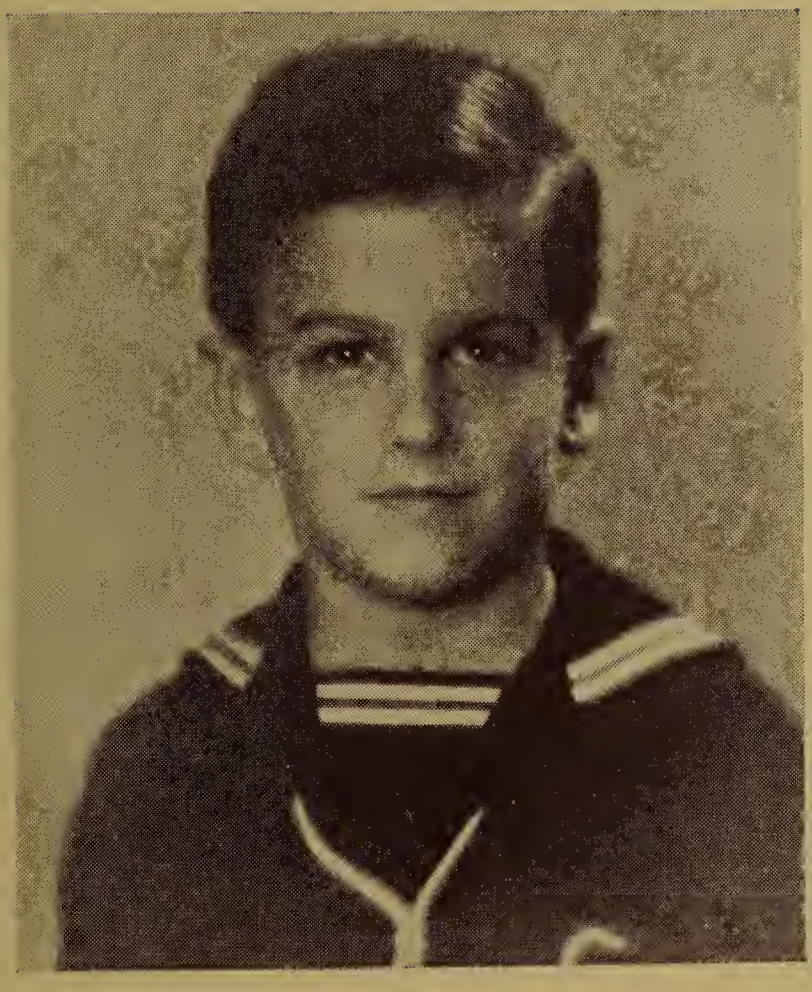
eft to right: Shirley Skiff Jannotta, Diane Broderick Jannotta, and Mary
rances Jannotta, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. A. Vernon Jannotta of Chicago

Stella Skiff Jannotta, Junior, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Jann
of Kenilworth, Illinois.



Master Joseph Edwin Jannotta, Junior, son of Mr. and Mrs. Joesph E. Jannotta of Kenilworth, Illinois.

Master Frank Skiff Jannotta, Junior, son of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Skiff Jannotta of River Forest, Illinois.



Master Edgar Dalzell Jannotta, son of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph E. Jannotta of Kenilworth, Illinois.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

ENTER MY GRANDCHILDREN

Allow me to present to you my grandchildren, the Skiff-Jannottas, who were introduced to life in the sturdy years of the twentieth century, ready for the balanced diet in its incipient stages, for mischief and merriment, love and protection, adventure and service, with their young curiosities whetted to receive such education as our twentieth century has developed, full heirs to the products of the genius of foregoing ages, as well as to their circumscribing prejudices and taboos. Like the ancient Greeks, they observe their little world to be still "in a constant state of flux." Change is our one constant. Governments are changing. Our economics are changing. Morals are changing. Religion is changing. Under these mutable conditions many writers are seriously asking the vital question, "Will the family survive?" Disintegrating forces may be discerned on the horizon, but family life as the supreme unit of our civilization has held the center of the stage thru the ages. Ties of blood are close. They breed a loyalty and love, a recognition of responsibility more enduring than all other bonds. It is worth a giant struggle to preserve the family as the supreme unit of our national life.

The children of our American frontier society, which closed only a generation or two ago, find themselves involved in complicated economic currents which could scarcely have been anticipated by their pioneer forefathers. It was the untrod paths before them that made pioneers of their grandfathers. Because they dreamed and dared, because of their hardships and dangers, because individuals and races and cultures

have been moulded into our great American impulse, we love and honor our past. But the much admired and hardy individualism of the early day has bequeathed to us national policies and traditions which create very difficult problems. In America, we live under an economic system which we are pleased to term capitalism. It presents us with ever recurring cycles of prosperity followed by a depression. In every depression, losses are great. Have we learned as much as we have lost?

Are we witnessing the breakdown of an economic system that has given us excellent service for several hundred years? It has unlocked the world's resources and erected great administrative properties and services. It has taught us the high value of freedom for individual initiative which is indeed an asset. We find that it is also a terrible liability. With the great bulk of the wealth of a naton accruing into the hands of a small proportion of its people, leaving millions stranded, the system becomes lame and halting, capitalism all set up for mass production and *nobody to buy.* Machines increasingly displace men but the machines have come to stay. Roger Babson, statistician and business analyst, says, "There are more machines in the blue print than have yet been placed on the market." Under the profit motive, that is natural and inevitable. More machines safeguard profits in spite of wage advances. New machines are installed and the men are discharged. Technological unemployment therefore increases and will *continue to increase.* Depressions follow prosperity in an endless cycle. The system works spasmodically. On our forum platforms we hear frank dis-

cussions of such subjects as, "Is Capitalism About to Collapse?" Some economists maintain that capitalism carries within itself the seeds of its own death. *Only the restoration of mass purchasing power will save it.* The more abundant that purchasing power is, the more satisfactory will be the profits. But, unfortunately, under the profit system, the machine and mass purchasing power work against each other. Capitalism *is* sick. We are told that "one of the most serious faults of capitalism is that it so stubbornly fights all attempts to cure its diseases—even when the recommendations come from its friends." If moneyed people continue pyramiding capital investments as they desire, the system will become top heavy and fall of its own weight.

In the midst of these checks to progress is the growing realization that there *is* something new under the sun. A great nation experiments with communism. For the first time in history a dictatorship for the benefit of the *working masses* is really placed upon the map. Property interests are abolished. Human interests are paramount. Their ideal, to abolish poverty, is admirable but their methods are not. To them, democracy is a lost exemplar. The dictatorship of the workers in Russia is followed by other dictatorships, the fascists, the nazis, proposing to protect property but with their totalitarian policies, spouting the glories of battle for the glory of their state, their inroads upon the propertied classes have been much more ruthless than is relished. The right of the individual to use his money to his own advantage, regardless of the interests of the state, is more and

more sharply restricted. Property under the nazis is not faring well.

Two major clashes are clearly emerging in the world arena. The first is the "haves" against the "have nots," not only as nation against nation, but within every nation, class against class. Whether you and I like it or not, communism is here. It is in the minds of millions of people all over the world, in China, Japan, Europe, America. They are thinking in terms of economic pustice for all, poverty abolished. You can't legislate this out of existence. The old formula, "the greatest good for the greatest number," is no longer adequate.

The "have nots" among nations, Germany, Italy, Japan, are not satisfied with the status quo. Pressure of population forces them to seek territorial outlets for their teeming millions. Nations which can not feed themselves depend upon their industrial exchanges as a source of living. Access to raw materials is basic. Ruthless peace treaties, which never should have been perpetrated, have been scrapped. They are willing to shed their blood to attain for themselves proper living conditions. It is idle to talk of birth control to nations whose military leaders demand more soldiers.

The Wall Street publication, "Commerce and Finance," says, "Boiled down to the core, the struggle in the international arena today is centered around the question of raw materials and markets."

The second of our major clashes that is occurring before our eyes today is between forms of government, dictatorships and democracies. "It is we or they" says Mussolini. There are those who frankly anounce that if they can once secure the power they

will kill the democratic system. The democracies in Europe are in grave danger. Democracy is too slow, they say. The pendulum swings backward and forward; a step forward, a step backward. While the argument goes on, a dictator steps into power. Unless democracy here in America puts up a royal fight to retain its cherished privileges, it may lose them. Free speech, free press, free assembly, and intellectual liberty of every kind are the fundamentals of our American life along with the right of the majority to rule. We want no concentration camps in America. To retain our great privileges, there is vital need for the creation unceasingly of strong moral opinion against the dictatorship form of government.

Let us not labor under the mistaken idea that the threat to our democracy may come from the first President in years who has endeavored to give a new deal to labor. It is the moneyed powers that would resort to dictatorship. They see their power slipping from them and would not be adverse to a dictator of their own choosing. As a smoke-screen to cover their intentions they attribute their own ambitions to Roosevelt. They are master camoufleurs. That is one way to apply the brakes frantically to policies that are hated. What is at stake is not party politics. Whether republicans or democrats are in power makes little difference. The problem is greater than that. The crucial point is, "Can the profit system be made to work?" As investments continue to be pyramided on top, mass purchasing power diminishes. If capital wishes to retain its ism, it will do well to forget the old slogan "My business is my own and the

public be dammed." *Capital, the cherished savings of the thrifty, has no value until labor and public interest give it value.* The public has a stake in every plant. A more disinterested cooperation with labor is the only safety valve, if we are to retain the capitalistic system of economics. The press of this country is largely in the hands of great wealth whose business it is to make the people think what they want them to think. Public opinion is the final arbiter of our destinies and the great moneyed interests well realize the importance of controlling our press. The tendency today in this country and in Europe is to consolidate into chains of newspapers. Control of the sources of news is steadily narrowing. However in the last election our newspapers received the shock of their lives. Notwithstanding the fact that eighty-five per cent of the press of the country was violently opposed to Roosevelt's re-election, he was swept into office by an overwhelming majority. Much of our press is out of touch with the march of the times. They do not express the great populace of America. Their journalistic shams are under strong attack. They have rather successfully made scare words of "communism" and "socialism." There are certain arguments which are stock in trade. One comes to mind, that the government can not make a success of any business, an argument that will not bear the light of careful investigation. "Regimentation" and "bureaucracy" are later scare words which have been a good deal overworked. The "whispering campaign" is a nauseating weapon too often applied for political ends. The day may arrive when men of outstanding ability for presidential honors will hesitate to sub-

ject themselves and their families to the scurrilous innuendoes of people who descend to banal personalities and are incapable of an intelligent discussion of issues. These are but a few of the minor devices which are employed. The most important news is often suppressed. As Professor Edward A. Ross of the University of Wisconsin suggested years ago, what the people need is an endowed press that will be entirely free from the pull of the big advertisers. There is many a gifted journalist who is more than eager to give the inside story of propaganda that is faked or falsified, or to tell of the suppression of articles that are detrimental to the interests of big advertisers. We do indeed need an endowed press, tabloid in form, with such headlines as will enable a busy business man to make an advantageous choice of the articles he wishes to read in order to know his world in the limited time he has to give to his morning newspaper.

One hundred years ago the red man passed on to the white man our western prairies in all of their pristine glory. They were unsurpassed in fertility anywhere. In one hundred years, the policies of the white man in the Mississippi Valley are proving disastrous. Its rich top soil is yearly washing into rivers and down to the Gulf of Mexico at the rate of from three to six inches. In pioneer days, every stream was clear. Today they are yellow with clay. Both water and wind erosion are denuding the bald clay hills. In many parts of the valley, the ground water table is sinking lower. Wells must be dug from ten to forty feet deeper. All of this is due to wasteful methods of tillage. We have read much of our waste of coal, oil and forests; but, for

us, who have always been taught that the good black soil of Iowa and the Mississippi Valley is unsurpassed, to read that that same black soil is now rapidly eroding to the sea is alarming. It is being washed out of the reach of service to man. Floods and dust storms have come to stay unless the government takes a hand. The soil of our country is a basic necessity. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "When the soil is gone, men must go, and the process does not take long." Many believe that if the present trends are not stayed, our wonderful Mississippi Valley is "on the way to join decadent parts of China and Asia Minor, once opulent and magnificent, but now stripped of their fertile soils"—which "never can be cured if neglected during the early stages." The report of H. S. Person, chairman of the National Resources Committee, and author of the very valuable pamphlet "Little Waters", and of Morris L. Cooke, chairman of the Mississippi Valley Committee, are very illuminating, also the book by Stuart Chase, "Rich Land, Poor Land."

The present generation appears to have made a sorry mess of things and can not complain if the youth of the world is poised for a revolt as is the case in many lands, including Europe, Japan, the United States. Youth says to us, "We are not impressed with the sort of world you are handing on to us, with its unjust peace treaties, inevitable breeders of more wars, its flagrantly unjust economic and social systems, its failure to enthrone reason and dethrone force as the arbiter of human destiny. We are inclined to think you have sadly bungled your problems. We are left holding the bag. The right to live should have been our first right, but we face conscrip-

tion. You can not complain if we revolt. We claim the right to blaze new trails in the search for peace, justice, liberty and opportunity."

The Youth Movement in America, which was instituted in 1934 at New York University in New York City, is rapidly gathering numbers and momentum. It recognizes changing conditions and is preparing to grapple with them. The Declaration of the Rights of American Youth, says, "Our country with its natural resources and mighty industries can more than provide a life of security for all. But today we are not provided with this security, are not permitted to enjoy its comforts. We want to work, to produce, to build, but millions of us are forced to be idle. We graduate from schools and colleges, equipped for careers and professions, but there are no jobs. You can find us along the highways, or in Army-supervised camps, isolated from friends and family."

"We refuse to be the lost generation."

Anti-war demonstrations are becoming nation-wide in our colleges and universities. The percentage is growing of those who refuse to fight wars, *fostered by greed.*

Their lives are threatened by war.

Their liberties are threatened by re-actionary legislation.

We are living in a transition period. The mills of today are grinding out the policies of tomorrow. What will they be? Everything is changing. Some sort of collectivism is in the air everywhere, from the cooperatives of England and the Scandinavian countries to the communism of Russia. Every Utopian plan is worth studying. Will capitalism survive? Though its accomplish-

Democracy is at stake. Civilization itself is at stake. Wars of retribution never end.

Only the mobility of youth is unafraid of the spirit of innovation and they are aroused. "War," say they, "no profit, no glory, no need." They are attuned to adjust the *causes* of wars of retaliation. World organization for industrial and commercial exchange is the need of the hour. May youth study the past to profit by its mistakes. May their determination to scrap unjust peace treaties and rebuild the League of Nations be unflinching. A new day is dawning on the horizon. May our grandchildren mount a higher hilltop in their search for peace, liberty, opportunity and justice, including economic justice.

—Stella Skiff Jannotta

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